

# NEW WORLDS SCIENCE FICTION

No. 109  
VOLUME 37  
2/6

JOHN RACKHAM

Goodbye,  
Dr. Gabriel

ROBERT  
SILVERBERG

Company Store

MIKE DAVIES

The Ship Of Heaven

KENNETH JOHNS

Bigger Birds

JOHN BRUNNER

Put Down This Earth

Conclusion



Features



A Nova Publication



15th Year  
of Publication



# NEW WORLDS

PROFILES

## Robert Silverberg New York



After the last "Profile" of Bob Silverberg had appeared in *New Worlds* No. 103 we had a horrified letter from him pointing out that the photograph we had used was years old—taken at a time when he was still an amateur writer. To assuage his ego he sent us a new photograph, proving that time certainly marches on.

No longer writing regularly for the science fiction market, Robert Silverberg still retains a close interest in the genre and the occasional story that appears in Britain is usually one that first appeared in an off-trail American magazine or paper-back. This month, for instance, his short story appeared originally in Ballantine's *Star Science Fiction No. 5*, a market which required new stories only. As the edition was never published or distributed in Great Britain we thought it deserved reproducing.

Bob and wife Barbara are now house-hunting outside the New York area for premises that will enable them to obtain a little living space as well as house the huge collection of books and magazines they have accumulated. Plus planning vacation trips to this year's World Science Fiction Convention in Seattle, Washington, and probably another European trip early next Spring.

# NEW WORLDS SCIENCE FICTION

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## TWO SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE

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# Interesting . . .

As if to give the lie to my comments in the June Editorial wherein I diagnosed a forthcoming shortage of British published science fiction in hard-cover or paperback form comes the news that Victor Gollancz Ltd., have announced a regular monthly programme of published books under the title of "Gollancz Science Fiction Choice." To confound the issue still further Gollancz state that some months there will be more than one title available, although only one novel will be labelled the "Choice" of the month. Leslie Flood elaborates on this in his review column this month.

On two counts this is tremendously interesting news, the unimportant part being whether my diagnosis ultimately proves correct or not. The important one is that Gollancz' scheduled project is, although badly timed according to my reckoning, one of the most significant steps in British science fiction publishing that has ever been taken. This country has long been in need of a publisher with sufficient courage to make a determined effort to sell s-f under a well-known imprint *and make a success of it.*

Looking back over the past ten years there have been several upsurges of interest by hard-cover publishers, starting with that disastrous 1952-54 period when everyone tried to get on the band-wagon and published titles indiscriminately. The trouble then was that, with few exceptions, none of the publishing houses had anyone on their staffs who knew the first thing about good quality s-f or even what constituted s-f apart from space-opera. This same period was also marred by a spate of the most appalling rubbish being produced in the paperback field under the guise of "science fiction," which did it considerable damage. Little wonder that this period went out in a blaze of adverse publicity for the genre.

There then followed a long period when the term "science fiction" was dropped from the dust jackets. This swing was led primarily by Michael Joseph Ltd., followed closely by Faber & Faber Ltd., but the former never found sufficient authors of the Wyndham calibre to make such a series successful and the latter have slowed down the number of published novels for the same reason.

# • . . News

More recently a great deal of s-f has appeared disguised as general fiction, the majority of it by unknown British writers with little literary skill and no knowledge of the carefully built up framework of s-f over the years. In fact, I have been appalled at the low quality of some of the work which has been published, even by general fiction standards.

It is no wonder, then, that Gollancz, by and large, are pinning their hopes on publishing many of the better quality American novels, of which there is most certainly a far better selection. However, when I mentioned the Gollancz plan to one American publisher who is in London he wished them luck in their continuous search for top quality material. As he pointed out (and he publishes a fair proportion of s-f titles each year) there just aren't sufficient good novels to ensure twelve titles a year. He has to rely upon a certain number of short story collections to keep his list going.

This leads to some further interesting thoughts. Until recent years the authors' policy has always been to write novel-length material primarily for serialisation in the magazines and subsequently for book publication. In the greatly diminished (American) field of magazine publishing there is far less opportunity of making a serial sale and more and more authors are writing primarily for book publication with secondary thoughts on serialisation. In fact, many American paperback publishers are producing "original" s-f novels now. This points up the fact that the men who are now shaping the policy of science fiction novel writing are the editorial staffs of the hard-cover and paperback houses—not the magazine editors. And they have a completely different outlook on what constitutes mass sales appeal.

Over the years the magazine editors have shaped the policies governing the type of stories to be published into a specific pattern from which the modern novel emerged. Now that policy is being altered still further and it may well be that authors will be allowed a far wider framework in which to express themselves.

*John Carnell*

We do not think there has ever been a science fiction story quite like this one. It is a new treatment of the synthetic man idea, taken almost entirely from his point of view as his senses are built up from zero.

# GOODBYE, DOCTOR GABRIEL

by JOHN RACKHAM

---

one

Old Doctor Gabriel shut the door of the flat behind him, very quietly, and stood awhile, getting his breath back. Those stairs were quite a pull for a man of seventy. He could have used the lift, of course, but there were some things he preferred to do the hard way, to prevent himself becoming too flabby. A man needs to take some exercise, once in a while, or his body will fail him when he needs it.

"Johnny!" he called, softly. "Johnny, you asleep?" and even as he said it, he smiled at himself. Strange how easy it was to slip into thinking of Johnny Dawson as just another ordinary young man. It was an unconscious tribute to skill and craft, for Johnny Dawson was, in all probability, the one person in the whole world who never had need to sleep, or even to rest.

Then Doctor Gabriel's smile faded, giving way to sudden concern, and wonder. There was no reply from Johnny. And there was something missing. A noise. It was a sound so faint that the average listener would never have noticed it, even if it

had been there. But it wasn't. And it should have been. The power-transmitter which should have been making that whispering sound had no business being silent. It had been so designed that it could not be switched off. Gabriel held his breath, hurried across the little room, all bright with morning sunlight, and into the bedroom-den beyond. There was Johnny, flat on his back on the divan, and quite still.

The old doctor's eyes went to the dark, bulking-black of the transmitter in the corner, and a flash of glitter-and-white caught his attention. There, in the middle of the carpet, was a fuse. So that was how ! He went forward, bent to peer at it, and saw the thin wire that was looped round the horns. He traced it back with his eye. The other end was round Johnny's wrist, where he lay. It was a simple matter, now, to reconstruct the sequence of events. Johnny had tied the wire round the fuse, laid himself down, and then stopped the transmitter with a single jerk of his hand. But why ?

Gabriel straightened up carefully, went across to the still figure and looked down. There, on the motionless chest was a black-backed loose-leaf note-book. He took it, gently, and went across the room to the desk, to the phone. To the switchboard attendant he said "This is Doctor Gabriel speaking. Please page Sir Andrew, discreetly, and have him come to the Dawson room. And take this number out of circuit until further orders." He racked the receiver, moved to an easy chair, and sat, with the book on his lap. All at once, he felt the full weight of his three-score-and-ten-years. Misgivings flooded to his mind, little odd fears that he had hitherto refused to acknowledge in the light of one brilliant success after another. Shaking them off with a shudder, he flipped the book open, saw the neat regular-as-print handwriting and shut it again. This was Johnny's diary, kept faithfully and in detail at doctor's orders, as the best therapy that could be had for traumatic shock. The door clicked, and Gabriel looked up as Sir Andrew Croxley strode in.

Croxley wasted no time in idle questions, but used his eyes. A big, iron-faced, burly man, he was not the type to understand or tolerate any sort of weakness in anyone else. For him, facts came before all else. He analysed the position in a flash and hunched his shoulders.

"So !" he said. "Found a way to switch himself off, did he ? Now why would he do that ?"

"I think the answer might be here." Gabriel tapped the book.

"That's the diary, isn't it? All right. While you're reading it, I'll . . ."

"No . . . after I have read it," Gabriel sharpened his voice just a trifle. "We raised Johnny from the dead once before. I will not be responsible if we do it a second time. Let me read this, first. Let me find out why."

"And throw away thirty-five thousand pounds worth of equipment and man-hours of work?"

"It may not be necessary. Who knows?"

"Wouldn't it be simpler to switch him on, and ask him why?"

"Perhaps, and perhaps not. As you say in this country 'I am the doctor.' You must let me decide this, after I have read his writing."

Croxley stood quite still a moment, thinking, then he shrugged, powerfully.

"All right. You're the doctor. But the reasons had better be good. I have work to do, right now, but I'll be back in an hour." Gabriel watched him go out, and sighed. Settling himself he got out a pipe, filled it, got it going to his liking, and opening the book he began to read.

*Sunday, August 15th, 1982.* Now that I have learned to use the hands well enough to be able to write, I am to keep a diary. This is it. It is Doctor Gabriel's idea. He seems to know more about me than anyone else, so I suppose he is right about this, too. It is supposed to act as a form of release, what he calls a 'catharsis,' and the same sort of thing that I would get from a psychoanalyst, or a priest. Only neither of them would want to have anything to do with me the way I am now. I can't say I blame them. I get cold shivers, or imagine I do, when I think about it.

I wonder what it will be like when I can see. It's an odd feeling, writing blind and without being able to feel anything. It seems a lifetime ago since I 'felt' anything. I suppose it is, in a way. No matter how I try, this all seems to have happened to someone else, not me. I can't *feel* it. Doctor Gabriel says this is because we live, and think, and feel, with our whole selves. And I am not a 'whole self' any longer. Yet I am just as much 'me' as ever I was. It is all very confusing. I

suppose I had better begin with that, with who I am, what is left of me.

I am . . . I was . . . John Ellis Dawson, twenty-six, unmarried and with no kin alive to be sorry for me. That's the good part, the only good part, although I had never thought of it like that before. I never thought myself much of a catch as a husband and father and I'd be even less now. All there is left of me, by what I'm told, is a bowl-ful of brain-stuff, some wires, a few motors, an auditory circuit, and these steel claws. I can hear—and move my claws—but I can't see, nor speak, not even spit. I'd be a fat lot of use to a wife and kids. Better off if I was dead. Perhaps I am. Legally I am, anyway. So Doctor Gabriel says. I wonder if he will read this?

He says he won't. He says the book has been specially designed to fit inside a strong-box with a cover, with only one key, and that key is one of my 'fingers.' So I am the only one who can open the box. It sounds like a lot of trouble just to safeguard my private thoughts, but he says it is an essential part of helping me to be fully human again. All human beings have privacy of some kind; in their thoughts, if nothing else. But it seems pointless. John Ellis Dawson, some squishy stuff in a plastic bowl, plus fittings. I wonder if the two thugs who did this to me ever give another thought about it. Doc says I should avoid thinking about them, just for a while, and try to find something to live for—but how can I help thinking about them—those two?

*Monday, August 16th.* I had to stop yesterday. Doc did warn me that an excess of emotion would overload my circuits. So it did. It would have been an advantage if something like that had been built into the human design over the ages. What a lot of suffering would have been saved, what a lot of mistakes prevented. I must ask Doc about that someday. If there had been some sort of overload to switch a man off when he lost his temper, I wouldn't be like this now. I suppose that's good coming out of evil. I'm supposed to try not to be bitter. But it's hard. It's all so damned unfair. Why did it have to be me? I mustn't dwell on that, or my circuits will blow again. I'm learning. I think, if I'm careful, I might be able to recall everything that happened just as it was, without breaking down. Strange, I never thought about 'nervous breakdown' like this before.

It was just three months ago. The evening of June 14th a Monday, about seven thirty. The laboratories were quite deserted. Everybody had gone home but me, and I was busy at my desk with some last minute rearrangements of the stores accounts. It was the sort of job where you want to keep on until it's all done, because it takes half an hour or so to catch up again if you leave it. And I heard a noise, a click. Then steps, the rattle of a door-knob, and a hint of a draught. I didn't get up. Just turned my head, wondering who had forgotten what. And I saw the two thugs. The first glance told me that that's what they were. A pair of evil, animal-like faces, stiff, quick-eyed, and that sort of tensed stance of men who are expecting anything to happen any minute. They were much much faster off the mark than I was. Two stun-guns were pointing at me in a flash—and I was as good as dead, right then, only I didn't know it. I later learned they had stunned the nightwatchman without being seen. But I saw their faces, quite plain.

"Keep still," the bigger one snapped, not that I'd had any chance to move. "You work here?" Which was such a silly question that I couldn't think of an answer right away. When I did get my wits I was equally inane.

"What the devil d'you think you're doing?" I asked.  
"What are you, burglars, or something?"

"Shaddap!" the big one ordered, exactly the way they do in the crime films. It made the whole thing just that bit more unreal, somehow. "I'll do the talking," he said. "You familiar with the filing-system, here?" That boggled me. There were dozens of filing complexes. Which one did he mean? And what on Earth for?

"Which filing-system?"

"The master one. The one that has all the information in it. You know about it?"

"I know how to use it, of course!" Which I did, but I was still stuck on what they were after. The big one didn't hesitate. He jerked his stunner.

"All right. Get up, slowly. March. Lead us to it. And don't try any funny tricks." It was still horribly unreal, and still is, when I look back on it. You see, I'm not the sort of person this kind of thing happens to. I'm—I was—just a senior store-keeper, going to night-school once a week to learn more about statistics to qualify for a slightly better . . .

but never mind, I led them to the main data-storage. I hadn't the slightest intention of being heroic about anything. As I say, I'm not that kind of person. A huge echoing room, with yards and yards of narrow lanes between ranks of instrument panels. The big man was a bit baffled, here, and showed it.

" You trying to be funny, mate ?" he demanded. " These don't look like no file-cabinets I ever see."

" They aren't," I said. " This is data-storage. It might help if I knew just what you're looking for. Honestly, I can't think what there can be here to tempt a burglar. This is a biochemical research foundation."

" Shaddap !" he said, again, and almost automatically. To his companion he said " Ches, you tell him. You got it writ down, somewhere." The man 'Ches' was uneasy, although he began fumbling in his pockets.

" We didn't ought to tell him," he argued. " He'll talk, for sure."

" Let me worry about that. Go on, read it out."

So Ches straightened the scrap of paper he had produced, and read out, " Hormone 176 stroke LNQ Stroke E, synthesis and structural formula," making a bad job of the pronunciation, but leaving no doubt as to what he meant. His partner jabbed me with the gun.

" That's what we want," he said. " Now, how do we get it?" I wish I could say, here, that I did a bit of quick thinking, but it just would not be true. In the back of my mind I was beginning to worry about what was going to happen to me afterwards. Would they be content to tie me up or would they use a gun on me? I knew a little about the action of such weapons. The effect is to discharge the potential-difference between the outer and inner layer of the nerve fibres, and, so far as I'd read, the result was painful in the extreme. I am a coward where physical pain is concerned. With these kind of fears clutching at my mind I had no time for brilliance. I showed them how to code the data into the appropriate storage unit, how to operate the printer, got them a record of the data they were seeking.

I did wonder, all the time, what it was, what they wanted it for . . . and then *who* they wanted it for. It was obvious that they were tools, hirelings of someone else. But most of all, I worried about what they were going to do to me. The big man had been worrying, too. Thinking about it, anyway. As soon as Ches had secured the strip of print, that gun was jabbed into

my back and I was marched back to a room we had passed through en route to the files. This was one of the bigger rooms where we kept the chief raw materials used in our research. A room I knew well. Everything carefully labelled, with my own hand. I will not try to describe in any detail what they did to me. I dare not think of it in any detail, anyway. The bare facts are as much as I can bear to recall.

They had me identify a huge vat of liquid as being concentrated equivalent of human digestive juices, which it was. Then they stunned me. It was painful, in the extreme, the more so because I remained fully conscious. Then they stripped me and put me in the vat. The paralysis wore off . . . and I felt the bite of the acid. Perhaps that pain helped to spur the passing of the paralysis, I don't know. The rest is rather blurred, and I am depending on what has been told me, by others who have reconstructed my movements from the traces. At any rate, I managed in some way to get out of the vat, to set off an alarm, and then, prompted by some strange quirk of my subconscious, I fell bodily into a deep-freeze locker. It didn't matter, of course, and this is probably why I do not remember very clearly. Because, you see, I already knew, by this time, that I was dead.

*Thursday, August 19th.* For the last two days Doc has been keeping me busy with his attempts to contact my visual circuits. Not very successful. I did get sensations of light, flashes of colour, very bright and uncomfortable. Doc says he could probably fix it, right now, so that I could tell the difference between light and dark, but he wants more than that and is working on an instrumental duplicate of the full human optical system. It will take time. In the meanwhile, I feel I ought to go on with this, as a kind of history, because it might be of some value. The trouble is, I have no sort of talent for describing things over and above the ordinary. All my training such as it has been, is in handling the facts, the quantities, the things one can touch and count. It used to be a labour for me just to write a personal letter. So how can I possibly describe what it felt like to be dead? It was just nothing. I felt nothing. I didn't even know that I was—it was like being very sound asleep, I suppose.

Until there was the most fearful noise in my ear. A noise and a pain at the same time. When I tried to roll my head away from it it stopped. By then I was awake. I

wondered where I was and what had happened? Then I recalled the racking ache of the stun-gun and the hot bite of the acid—and I yelled and struggled. That is, I tried to yell and struggle. But nothing happened. I couldn't feel anything. I couldn't even feel me, not my face, my arms, legs, body, not anything. There wasn't anything at all. Not even darkness. It sounds odd but it's true. I knew I was not in darkness. Then, worst of all, I realised I wasn't breathing either. At least, I couldn't feel it. I remember thinking in a mad way 'This is it. I'm dead.' And then there was a blank. Just nothingness.

Then the noise came again. It was like a crackle, a tingle and a bang, all at the same time. This time, I couldn't locate it at all, as being in my head, my ear, outside, or anything. It just was. It stopped and came again, all around me, inside and out, everywhere at once, and then nothing. I had a whole kaleidoscopic strip of impressions, wondering whether I was about to be reborn as a baby in line with some theories I'd heard. If so, I thought, I shall do my damndest to hang on to my memories. But why no body, no physical sensations at all? Then it occurred to me that perhaps I was just a sperm, that fertilisation had just happened and that noise might well have been the puncturing of the ovarian membrane. But, a noise of any kind, meant 'hearing' and how could a sperm hear? I was thoroughly confused by now.

## two

The crackle came again and with it the conviction that there was some awful screaming pain, quite close, just out of reach but that it would hurt me, engulf me, if I as much as moved. But I couldn't move, anyway. There wasn't any 'I' to move. Again the banging crackle and I began to wonder about it rather than me. I suspected that this was something 'being done' to me. By someone else. I wondered who. I wanted them to stop. I was afraid of the close-by pain. And again the crackle came, became a screaming shout.

"How does that look?" someone roared. I tried to roar back, and felt agonisingly helpless. Not quite so deafeningly, someone else said, "The pattern is different, now, sir." Then there was a monstrous thud . . . thud . . . thud, and I became

aware of a multitude of noises, of clicks, buzzings, sighs and roarings, and a voice again, slightly less loud.

"Yes, that looks more like it. A significant deviation. He is conscious, at any rate. The other ripples were just reaction to stimulus. Now, how can he let us know that he is hearing us, if he is?" There came that thud . . . thud . . . thud again, and the original bellowing, shattering voice. "Dawson! Johnny Dawson! This is Doctor Gabriel, speaking." The words were difficult to distinguish, as they were so loud as well as booming. 'Gabriel' I thought. It can't be. Isn't he the one who's supposed to blow a trumpet or something? And could this odd nightmare be Heaven? That was the first time such a thought had occurred to me, and it frightened me dreadfully, more than anything else so far.

"Does he show anything, now?" the Gabriel-voice asked.

"The A-rhythm has gone completely flat. He's thinking . . ."

"Good. At least something different is happening. Watch while I try again." The voice, which had lessened, now grew monstrous again. "This is Doctor Gabriel speaking. We are in the upper wing in the experimental laboratory of Ungar Electronics, which is next door to the Croxley Bio-chemical Research Establishment where you were employed as chief storekeeper. How's that reading . . .?"

"Getting a regular flicker and flatten, sir," the second voice sounded excited. "It's definitely a response. He's hearing you, all right!"

"Good. Very good! We make progress but we must not rush this. We must devise some way in which he can respond, before we go any further . . ." and that was the end of the bellowing, but the multitude of other little noises remained.

I was excited and bewildered, all at once. I could place this Gabriel now. A little grey-haired, ruddy-faced old man, reputed to be eccentric. According to a story I'd heard, he had been a very great man indeed, a specialist in brain-surgery, somewhere in Europe. Then his wife had deserted him and taken the child with her. Destroyed his reason for living, I suppose. Anyway, he threw up his big work, left his own country, and came to Ungar in some minor capacity. That was the story. His job, as I understood it, was welfare and adjustment officer—a sort of wailing-wall. There were rumours, too, that Ungar's were working on a big project in the 'electronic brain' field and that Gabriel had been welcomed into his job

because they hoped to milk him for a lot of important knowledge in that field.

But this, though interesting, was only confusing me. What was I doing in Ungar's, anyway? Where did my firm come into it? I knew that old Man Croxley was pretty well in with the Ungar crowd and that we used quite a bit of their equipment, one way and another, but not the other way round. What use would an electronics firm have for bio-chemical stuff? The Gabriel-voice came again, not nearly so loud, and much more comfortable.

"We will try a single, on-off response to a motor-centre. The light . . ." and I heard a barrage of noises. Then, incredibly, there was a tickling in my left hand, as if someone was touching my palm. I tried to grasp, but nothing happened, nothing moved, there was no feeling of arm, or fingers—and the tickling stopped. I tried again to 'touch' where the sensation had been. And there was a blast of noise that was completely beyond deciphering—inside me, where I couldn't get away from it. Stunned, I managed to make out words.

"The light! The light!" and then, a little more quietly, "Dawson! I think you are hearing me. I want you to try to move your right hand—now!" I did, desperately, as hard as I could. I couldn't feel anything at all.

"Now . . ." the voice roared, "Now try the left hand . . . the *left* hand!" I tried again, just as hard. And the result, for me, was just as negative. But the reaction from the voice was deafening. It was like a physical blow, with the worst part about it that I could do nothing to dodge it at all. Then it died down to the point that I could make out words again. Gabriel said—screamed—

"That was good. Very good. Now listen. When you try to move your left hand, as you did just now, a light comes on because of a relay—and we can see it. On, and off again. Understand? Do it again, please . . ." And, wonderfully, I strained once more to move my left hand. Nothing that I could feel. But the voice yelled praise.

"Good. Once, on and off. We will call that 'yes.' Will you please try to do it twice, quickly, which will mean 'no'?" It was insane but I tried it. I strained—and strained again. There was nothing but the effort for me. But it worked. There was a silence, so far as the voice was concerned.

Then, "I must remember only to ask sensible questions, with yes or no answers. You are hearing me, of course. Are you hearing me plainly?" I gave him a quick 'no,' on that, and there was a pause. "Oh—I wonder. Is it not loud enough?" I gave him a 'no' again. "Ah—is too loud?" Now I gave him a yes. "So—too loud. Very well. I will adjust the amplifier. Please flash when it is as you think comfortable," and he began to roar 'Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday . . .' getting weaker and weaker all the time, until it was as if someone spoke in a quiet tone, about a foot from my ear. I gave him a quick flash.

"Now? Dear me. As sensitive as that? I had not dreamed—it must have been very distressing for you. I am sorry. Now, listen, Johnny Dawson. I will tell you a little. More will come later. Only a little for now, then you must rest. We have worked hard for several days, you see. Several days. At first we could not be sure, even, that you were alive at all. The encephalograph showed us a pattern, something like a man when he is asleep. So we tried. And now, we have succeeded. Yes. It is very gratifying. And exciting, too. I itch, I burn, to ask a thousand questions—what you are thinking, how you are feeling—but all in due course. First we must adjust the nutrient supplies for you while you are awake, because the metabolism is different from when you were sleeping. I will ask just one question, perhaps. You do not feel any pain, now, I think? Oh, I am sorry. I will ask it properly. Are you in any pain?"

I strained twice, for 'no,' and he sounded relieved.

"Good. We have known, for a long time, that the brain itself is not sensitive to pain, and we have suspected that the source of pains, of sensations, are in the body—but we could not be sure, until now. Good. Now—what can I tell you?" He paused again, probably to collect his thoughts. I needed to collect mine, too. He had given me a lot to think about. Brain—but no body? How on earth could that be?

"This is Saturday, the 19th of June," he said, in that gentle, grandfatherly tone of his. "You were found at 4 a.m. last Tuesday morning, in a deep-freeze chamber. What was left of you. Very unpleasant for your assistant and I will not disturb you with full description. The man believed you dead, and quite naturally. But he was sensible enough to call someone else. And you have such a *lot* of medical staff in Croxley.

Such a lot. Friends of mine, some of them. The assistant director, Jameson—a very fine anatomist—he examined you. And he called me. Puzzling features, he said. Very intriguing. So I came," and he went on to explain in simple terms what had happened.

They had thought me dead but the closer examination showed that this was not necessarily so. What with the paralysis, the digestive juices, and the deep-freeze, all of which could be deduced, there were odd results. Only Mr. Jameson, Sir Andrew, and Doctor Gabriel, were involved. They decided to let it be known that I was dead—as everyone assumed—and they gave Gabriel carte blanche to do anything and everything he thought necessary and possible. Of course, they desperately wanted to know who the thieves were and what they'd been after. That was the main reason.

"So, for the moment," the old man told me, "your brain lives. We could not save anything else, unhappily. But we will try to build the rest for you. We will try. Already you can hear me. You are hearing me through a microphone and an apparatus which I have connected to the auditory centres in your brain. And you can say 'yes' and 'no' to me, through a motor-nerve centre. Soon you will be able to talk properly and see. Not yet, for these things are all very delicate and will require much skill and trial. But—in time. Now, is anything worrying you, that we can deal with right away?"

I wanted to give him a 'yes' on that, but hesitated. It was grim misery being able to say nothing more than 'yes' or 'no,' but there wasn't anything do to about that. Nothing that wasn't already being done, anyway. So I gave him a 'no,' and he went away, leaving me to listen to the gently whining machinery and the ticking of the clock. And to think.

*Saturday, August 21st.* Again we have had a busy two days. Doc has been trying to make my visual circuits work. He talks to me all the time and I write my replies. He is always patient, always mild, but I get the impression that he is losing hope. I can't help much. What little education I had doesn't help with a task as technical as this. I can picture, to a certain extent, what a devil of a job it must be to try to wire up all the thousands of nerve-fibres that go to make up the signal-nerves from the eye to the brain. But I don't think I had ever really thought, before, what a fantastically complicated thing a body is. Still this is Saturday and Doc tells me he will be away for

the week-end to consult a few specialist friends of his. I gather I've given the old man a new lease on life, something new to live for. That's ironic because the boot should be on the other foot. What little hold on life I have I owe to him, if ever anyone did. Anyway, the week-end should give me the chance to bring this record up to date. In some ways, it is a depressing business, writing it up. I remember reading an old story by H. G. Wells, in which he makes the point that there's not much fun in smoking a pipe if you can't see the smoke. I had never thought of it before but the same thing applies to writing. I know that I am writing all this down, and I am using a sort of visual and spatial memory in order to do it, but it isn't the same as being able to see it. I get depressed. Will I ever see, or feel, or talk—or anything—again?

And if I do, what will it ever amount to? I imagine any reasonably fit and healthy young chap, such as I was, cringes from the idea of being blind, crippled, and helpless. Never to walk again, to swim, to lean into a breeze, to do all those things that one takes so much for granted. All I have is hearing, and that, ironically enough, was the one sense I appreciated least, before. Not for me the sensuous joys of music, or voices, or the songs of the birds. Now I listen because I can't do anything else.

I'll never forget those two faces—never. But I mustn't think of that, or I will get excited again.

I left off at the point where I could answer 'yes' and 'no,' and that was June 19th. Now it is August 21st. If nothing else, this 'death' of mine has sharpened my memory. When I come to think of it, that's all I am. Just a memory. Doc, trying to be kind, has said that a lot of people would swap me, for my sense of being detached, away from physical cares. I wonder. I suppose that is what philosophy is for and I wish that I had more of it. But I was never much hand at philosophising. Looking back on my life, as I have had lots of time to do, I am appalled by the emptiness of it. Schooldays, night-school, a casual trip to Europe, empty holidays, odd flirtations—they all seem so much on the surface, now. I wasn't there, at the time. Damned if I know where I was but I certainly wasn't there, living my life the way I am here, now, a prisoner—not alive.

Now that I am ninety-nine per cent dead, the least little thing is precious. The tick of the clock is an old and valued friend. Doc Gabriel's step, the rustle of his clothes, the sound of his

voice, all these things have depth. Even this room, which I have never seen, has a sound all its own. I'd know it from any other room at once. Gabriel's assistant, Willis—I imagine him as a tall thin sort. And nervous. He's red-hot at metering instrumentation, but he's sorry for me and afraid of me, too. It shows in his voice and the noises he makes when he moves. He doesn't come in much, now. Once I'd learned to operate the hands, he seemed less keen than ever. I think he was scared.

That was quite an event, though, in itself. Doc had been experimenting a lot, separating out the right and left hand motor-centres and then trying to get them connected. The big day was a Monday, July 5th. He sprang it on me as a surprise although I could tell from his voice that there was something afoot.

"I have given you two hands, Johnny," he said. "I have just made the last connections. Now, will you think of the index finger of your right hand—and move it—now!" I cannot begin to express how futile this felt. Nothing at all. But he was delighted.

"It moved!" he said. "It moved!" It was like a prayer the way he said it. Under his patient instruction I moved each finger in turn and then the whole hand. And the other hand. It was slow and tedious in the extreme, because I could feel nothing at all from any of it. It wasn't even like groping in the dark. It was just nothing. Many a time I would have given up but it was only that warm, gentle old voice, and the patient, quiet encouragement, that kept me going on. Absolutely pointless until the afternoon, when he brought in a typewriter.

He didn't tell me. He just said, "Move your left hand just a shade to the left—a bit more. Good. Now the right hand, to the left a bit—more—hold that. Good. Now, think your right index finger down and up quickly . . ." and there was a distinct 'click.' "Now the second finger, left hand . . ." There was another 'click.' "You have just typed your initials—J. D.—Johnny," he said, and there was pride, sympathy—and a smile, in his voice.

There was shock in my mind. Up till then the wearisome 'Move this, move that' had been dream-stuff. No reality in it at all. But I could hear the click of the typewriter, and it was linked with my 'effort.' That was me doing that. I doubt if anyone ever worked so hard to learn typing as I did or with such odd handicaps. But I learned. I learned something else,

too. That I have positional memory. I have it although I do not understand it. Doc was, and is, delighted. He told me that there had been all sorts of theories to try to explain goniometric functions but that none were quite satisfactory. Goniometry is that function you employ when you put your hand down and round a blind corner, take hold of something, and know at once that it is a five-eighths hexagonal-headed nut, and that you are twisting it in an anticlockwise direction. Although I am nothing but a brain, I still have this sense as a purely mental thing, because I have no senses to monitor it. And I can type.

I gather that the machine is on a special table and that my 'hands' are on a lazy-tongs kind of affair—and I hit the keys by a kind of inspired guesswork. It was shortly after this that Doc put me on to the writing that I am doing now.

"Your typewriter," he said, "stands on a box, with a lid. It is locked, and the only key is the index finger of your left hand. I will guide you, as you open it." By this time, of course, I was not likely to argue. But I did wonder. "The box," he said, "will be your privacy. When you are alone, you will write. I will teach you. You will write in a book, like a diary, and you will keep it in the box. No-one will read it. It will be your self-expression, somewhere in which you can unburden your mind. This is very necessary for you. For anyone, but especially for you."

So I learned also to write. I crushed the first three pencils, until I learned how wide apart to 'set' my fingers. Then I was able to handle a ball-pen, which I leave out for Doc to check on, in case it should run dry. I even learned the correct adjustment for the thickness of a single sheet of paper, and I can and do 'remember' the side-to side limits of the paper-width, and the length. And I have Doc's word for it that my writing is as precise as if it was done by a machine. In a way, it is. When I think of the 'shape' of a letter it is an ideal shape, and these hands do exactly what I want them to do. There is no human error, here, as with human hands.

So, I keep my diary, and thus I bring it up to date. I think, as an idea, it has worked after all. Certainly, I feel that I have achieved something. From one point of view, I suppose you could say I have achieved a tremendous amount. But, from another, it is pathetically little. I am still just an ear and a pair of hands. Judging by the time it has taken to get so far, I begin to doubt if I shall ever be anything more than that.

*Monday, August 30th.* I can see ! And I can talk ! More soberly and more accurately, I have had visual flashes and I have heard noises that were made by me. Neither were very impressive, considered objectively. The sight, if I can call it that, was quite unlike anything I had expected. Doc warned me.

"I think I have all your optical network connected, Johnny," he said. "I don't know, yet, whether you will see anything at all or what you will see—but you must try to describe it, whatever it is, as exactly as you can. Anything—and everything. I will switch on, now."

Lord knows what I expected but it certainly wasn't what happened, at all. I have already written, earlier, that I had no sensation of being in the dark. I don't know how this can be, as I had always gone along with the idea that absence of all light *is* darkness, and I certainly had no light. But I had no darkness either. Just a nothing. Now, when Doc closed his switch, I got a crackle and there may have been a flash—it was too brief to swear to—but then I *was* in the dark. The difference was quite positive and quite indescribable. I was aware of blackness. I typed out, "I'm in the dark, now," and heard Doc snatch a quick breath.

"Dark," he said. "So—nothing happens ?"

"No, that's not right. Before there was nothing. Now—darkness," and I heard him humming, under his breath as he pondered.

"Yes—I think—listen, Johnny—I think, before, there was no visual signal at all. So no sensation. But now, positive darkness. So—it must be—the nerve-endings are fatigued. The stimulus is too gross. It is like the hearing all over again. I am blinding you. That must be it. I will switch off, make adjustments, and try again."

Nonsense though it may sound, the darkness went away. After a while, he tried again. I despair of ever being able to explain how one can itch with impatience, when one hasn't anything to itch with, but I did, just the same.

"I am switching on again, now," he said. "Tell me what you see." That was easy. All at once I was a burning blue-and-white glare. I *was* it. There was no sense of seeing, of looking at it. I was in it, and it was all round me at once, and it was blinding.

"Too much," I typed, rapidly. "Glaring. Too bright."

"Incredible," he muttered. "We have been so very far wrong on sensitivity, and about neuron conductivity. My

titanium wires, they are a hundred times more efficient . . ." and all the time he mumbled the glare was fading, until, at last, it was quite bearable. It was as if I was that well-known geometrical point, of position but no magnitude, in the middle of a sphere shifting, writhing, glowing light.

"Better," I typed. "Comfortable." And then I had to try to describe what I was seeing, while he explained. He had rigged up a device something after the style of a television camera. This was what I was seeing through. Yet, what I saw was all around, over and under—and through me. He held up shapes and asked me to identify them. I tried. Green stripes whirled round me like a glowing barber's pole, and this was a blue square. Then the stripes became green and red, although I couldn't tell which was which, naturally. And that was a red square. It was crazy. I was scared. But he was pleased. Delighted.

"So!" he gloated. "This time, we were right. The optical scan *is* a spiral. Good. We can soon correct for that. Now, what shape is this?" and there were more stripes whirling about me, different sizes, this time. Bands of yellow and blue-green, thick and thin. That, according to him, was a yellow triangle. We did a few more. I was struck by the vividness of the colours. He explained that, so far, he had made connections only with the colour nerve-lines. There wouldn't be any black and white for a while. And that was the first time I had ever realised that we do have fittings in our eyes for seeing black and white and shades of grey.

The voice was something of an anticlimax. Doc told me he had connected my speech centres to an electronic hook-up which gave pure sounds. I tried it. I 'spoke,' as clearly and distinctly as I could, the letters of the alphabet. At least I began to. But when I heard the weird sounds, something like the scream of oscillation from a badly-tuned radio, it put me right off. That was me? It was awful and it didn't seem much of a return for all the work that had gone into it. But Doc was pleased, more pleased than I've heard him for some time. I have the feeling that he has something up his sleeve that he's not telling me about, in case it should turn out to be a disappointment. It would be just like him. I'd say he is far and away the kindest, most understanding man I've ever known. I find it hard to imagine what kind of a woman his wife must have been, to be unable to live with such a man. But I suppose that is an unfair judgment.

## three

*Monday, September 13th.* Tedium, I find, is not something to be relieved by writing or by thinking. It just has to be endured. That is why I have not written anything for a week. Today, though, Doc surprised me with a new development on my 'voice.' Up to now I've been going 'Eeeh!' and 'Oooh!' and feeling disgusted. But now I have more. The old man must have pestered just about every technician in the building to get an artificial larynx made and an air-pump which operates from my costal nerve-centres. I breathe. I speak. It hovers between a tinny croak and an echoing roar but it makes words. It is me and I can talk. All this time I had been fretting because Doc was concentrating all the time on the voice instead of the eyes, but now I'm glad. And I understand.

Lord, what a difference it makes, just to be able to talk. It is just on midnight and the old man hasn't long been gone. I wouldn't let him away. Never knew I had so much to say or so many questions to ask. About me. The brain that is all of me—that's kept in a sealed compartment, fed and oxygenated by constant-running machinery. That's the gentle whirring I've been hearing. Both firms have contributed all their reserves of experience and equipment just to help me. I'm famous in a strictly secret way. And I'm expensive, too. They have all spent a lot of money on me, and time. And I know why, now. It's that hormone formula. Those crooks went off with what is tentatively called the 'youth' hormone secret. This didn't seem so world-shattering to me, until Doc explained and I thought about it a bit.

Injections of this hormone have the power to retard ageing, to maintain a person at whatever physical age he happened to be when he started taking it. As Doc pointed out, you could sell this stuff at your own price to all sorts of people in high places. Politicians, statesmen, tycoons, dictators, economic bosses, and that sort. I still couldn't see anything so terrible about it, until he went on to explain that learning, the accumulation of wisdom, good sense, even sanity—those are ageing processes, too. Stop one and you stop the lot. And the world cannot afford the risk, the danger, of mentally-frozen people in high places. So, they *had* to know who stole the formula, where it was now, who had been injected with it, and so on. I saw those two men and could identify them. From that they could work back to the organisation they were working for.

I feel a bit let-down, somehow. I suppose it is natural to want to be wanted for one's own sake. Funny, now that I can talk, I seem to have lost most of my interest in writing. It seems rather pointless, now.

*Friday, September 17th.* I have been busy perfecting my voice. It is a bit like learning to play an instrument—and what an instrument! If there had been any music in me at all, I could be a great singer now. But that is by the way. The big thing today was that I had an interview with Old Man Croxley. Sir Andrew Croxley, I should say. Director of the firm. I had met him once before. He sounded afraid, and worried, and kind, all at once. Couldn't seem to grasp the idea that I'm not in pain. And he's really soft about pain. You would never guess it from his looks. But I'm not in any pain. Sometimes I almost wish I was.

But I know, now, why they are really worried about that hormone. It has not been properly tested and refined, not yet. That's why it was filed away under a code number. There are undesirable side-effects which are not very well understood. In some cases it can produce raving insanity and delusions—in others it is fatal, practically instantly. It has to do with antibody and ion factors in the blood stream. And Croxley's dare not release the news that it has been stolen. There would be crazy publicity for a start, which would be bad for business. And that would be just what the crooks would want, because it would help them to make contact with suitable buyers—give them a sort of certificate of genuineness.

Croxley told me that three members of the U.S. Senate were suspected. Two had died suddenly and suspiciously, and the third was in a nursing home. Also five British M.P.'s, and half a dozen big business men, two of them 'Press Lords'; and two lightning revolutions in South America. All suspicious items. And these are only the few that they can spot because they have gone wrong, somehow. Lord knows how many others have passed unnoticed. And all on account of that blessed formula. So I've got to hurry up and get to the point where I can see, and see well enough to be able to identify those two thugs from pictures.

Suddenly I'm very important, worth thousands of pounds in equipment for one thing, and Lord knows how much more, in potential.

All at once, I asked, "What do I get out of all this?" and Croxley was quite upset and a bit baffled, too. Doc ticked me off about it after he had gone. In a gentle way, but very firmly. I argued with him, too. So they have all done a lot for me—but what have they done for 'me'—and what can they do? What good is all the money, and the fame, and the prestige to me now? I was quite bitter and all sorry for myself for a while, for some damn silly reason. It's all gone now, but it was nasty while it lasted. What stopped it, I think, was Doc's discovery that my horrible feelings were making a change in the pH readings of my brain-bath. He was so intrigued with this that I couldn't be angry with him any more.

*Monday, October 11th.* It's odd that being able to talk has robbed this writing of all its importance. I keep on working out what I'm going to say to Doc now, instead of getting down to the book. But the crafty old man surprised me today. The biggest shock I've had so far. It's unfair, somehow, that he can be tinkering with my brain and I can't even feel it, or know that he's doing it. That's what he was doing all morning. Then, right in the middle of his idle chatter, he suddenly stopped, and said, "Stand by, Johnny. This may surprise you a little bit."

And I felt myself falling. It was awful. There I was, dropping and rolling and toppling and thrashing away with my arms and legs to keep my balance—only I haven't any arms and legs—and then it stopped.

"I switched off again," he said. "I should have warned you, maybe."

"What the hell was *that*?"

"I have managed to connect up all your afferent nerve-loops," he said. "Now—you can *feel*. I will switch on again. Be ready this time. You are *not* falling, please. Do not worry about that. Just try to feel—your hands, or your feet—movement. Ready?"

It wasn't so bad this time, although I still felt unsteady. It was a bit like floating on a warm nothing. Warm. And there was movement. Up and down. Front and back. All the things I hadn't consciously missed until now. I could actually hear whereabouts in the room Doc was by the sound. Before he had just been a voice inside me. Now he was outside, out there. He still is. And I can feel my hands working, this paper, the ball-pen, the typewriter keys, the hard top of the

box. What a tremendous difference it makes. And somehow I'm afraid of it. I didn't think of it like this before, but I've been safe, secure, up to now. But with these new sensations—I'm afraid.

*Monday, October 18th.* By the end of this week, Doc says, I may be able to see properly. I gather they have been working very hard on a relay and scanning system that will match the brain method exactly.

"Who's 'they'?" I asked him. He told me. I am staggered and humble. That dear old man—he has been jet-hopping all over the world, chasing up great men, specialists in all sorts of things, bothering them, nagging them, getting their advice and co-operation, and help—for me. He told me of some of the names.

"This, Johnny," he said, with a funny little tremble of pride in his old voice, "is what they call the 'Brotherhood of Science.' No amount of money in the world could buy these men—or their skills—but they give them." And they are giving them to me. Me, a nobody-storekeeper that was, now a basinful of grey matter, and they are giving of their knowledge and skill to help me! Some of them are actually coming here, from the remote parts of the world, to help. And all so that I might see again.

But he has something else up his sleeve. I'm sure of it. He can't deceive my new ears. I won't ask. I won't spoil his pleasure. There is one bad part, though. I am to be switched off for as long as the operations will take. It's a frightening thought. What will it be like? Will it be nothingness and nowhere again, or will I be conscious, but shut in? I don't know—and Doc says he doesn't know, either.

*Wednesday, November 10th.* This is my birthday, in more ways than one. I hardly know where to begin, or how. I feel a fool, to sit here—yes, sit right here at a desk—and write this when I ought to be out, out in the air and the light, living in the world of men again. Because I can now. Or I will be able to very soon. I am a whole man again, something I never dared to dream of or think about. Yet, here I am. Those are my hands, fingers, finger-nails, even. Perhaps I'm raving or dreaming. I can hardly believe it yet.

On the morning of Tuesday, October 19th, Doc switched me off. It was an awful moment. Sitting in a dentist's chair is

nothing remotely like it. I don't know what I didn't expect or dread. But there was nothing, not even a click.

And then—I came back. It was nothing spectacular. I heard the old familiar humming, and I thought, at once, "Ah, they've forgotten something. Switched me on while they sort it out," and then came Doc's voice.

"Johnny!" he said, "You can hear me, yes? Just listen, please. I am now standing by a control-box. I have just switched on your hearing. Now I will close another switch and you will please tell me how you are, right?" I heard the tiny click of the switch.

"I feel just the same, Doc," I said. "What's the matter—something wrong?"

"Not a bit," he chuckled. "Be ready for some big surprises Johnny. Really big ones this time. To start with, this is November 10th, today."

"Good Lord!" I said. "Then I've been—away—for three weeks! It seemed just like a moment to me. But why so long? Something *did* go wrong, didn't it?" but he chuckled again, mischievously.

"Not at all. Something, I hope, has gone very right. But, today is your birthday, isn't it?" And so it was. I'd forgotten but he hadn't.

"Yes," he said. "I looked it up. And this, Johnny, is a birthday you will never forget. Please listen very carefully. I am going to close another switch and you must promise me that you will *do* nothing. Nothing at all. Just keep still and feel. Get used to the feeling. All right?"

"All right," I promised, wondering—and the switch clicked—and I just can't explain how, but I could feel 'me.' All of me. My feet, my toes, the brush of cloth on my knees and the scratch of it on the backs of my legs, on my back. My shoulders, arms, hands, head, neck, the back of my head, resting on something soft—it was insane, impossible—but it felt real. It was a trick, of course. A strange trick. Pointless. I kept calm although I wanted to feel angry.

"Pretty good," I said, and I could feel my throat, my mouth, my tongue, and hear the head-noises—what the hell? "Pretty good!" I said again. "It's quite a trick. Feels as if I have a whole body. What is it? Ghost-memories, like amputees have, about lost limbs?" Doc chuckled again. He was standing over to my left, about four feet away, and I was sitting I could swear it.

"Not a trick, Johnny," he said. "You just get used to it, while I'm telling you. A long time back, when you first managed to move a relay, I had this idea. I went to Sir Andrew Croxley, and my own chiefs, and some other people. And I persuaded them. You are a very valuable property, Johnny—from research. So they agreed with me. Medicine is international. Much we have already done but from you we could learn much more, to help other unfortunate people. Everybody was willing to help—the Russians, the Americans, the Swiss—everybody."

"And we, in Ungar, we have our little secrets. Micro-miniature relays and a tight-beam broadcast-power system, for instance. Croxley's—they have some wonderful plastic biological substitutes, for skin, hair, sinew, muscles—it all worked out very well. We got photographs and sculptors, designers, engineers, and we got headaches, too. Many of them. Oh yes. But we did it. If you are ready—don't move, now, until I tell you—I will close another switch."

And I saw red. Literally. My thoughts beat his words by a split second.

"Open your eyes, Johnnie," he said, gently. And I did. It doesn't sound much but it was all the world. I could feel my eyelids move. I could see! A blaze of light, patches of dark, and all the colours of the rainbow at first. It was dazzling. But it began to settle down and to come into focus. That was the weirdest sensation. It needed a conscious effort—like pushing in and out with my eyes. But that was it and I managed to get it. I saw—a desk, a wall, a carpet, a pencil, a box of coloured paper-shapes that children play with. I could feel my eyes move.

"Not too quickly, at first," Doc cautioned, away over to my left. "Only the involuntary reflexes are moving so far. Eyes and breathing too. Say something, Johnny. What do you think of it?"

"I don't know what to think," I said, and I could feel my chest move, feel the breath in my mouth. "The feelings—they're too much, all at once. I'm conscious of everything, all in a heap, as if I itched inside and out, all over."

"Ah!" he said. "Now, some of that will be just natural novelty. It will pass off. But we may have to make adjustments to the various sensitivities. I will lower the general volume a little," and I could feel all the sensations gradually die away. It was creepy. As if I was shrinking and dissolving.

"No!" I said, quickly. "Bring it back. Give me a chance to get used to it first." We spent quite a bit of time on that, with me trying to direct my conscious attention to various parts of my body—toes and fingers, things like that, until I was fairly comfortable. Then came the big moment. I could tell by his voice, as he warned me.

"Now!" he said. "This might be all wrong because we are working on a system of transmitted power, so be careful. I am switching on your motor-nerve complex." And nothing happened. I didn't feel a thing, except a big let-down.

"I don't feel any different," I said, disappointed.

"Try to turn your head," he advised. "Very gently—to the left. Look at me, Johnny!" And I saw Doctor Gabriel, for the first time. My head—*my head*—moved, and turned and he was standing there, by the switchboard. A little, untidy, grey-haired, funny old man, with spectacles, in a grubby white coat, and the tears running down his face. For joy! For me!

The next hour or so has no place here, not even in a diary like this. There are some things that should not be put into words, not ever. Just to give the bald facts—I could move my head, my arms and legs—I could stand, and walk, after a fashion. They have made me a body, a wonderful body. It is an almost perfect human copy. Doc has told me of the fabulously intricate skeleton and musculature, the miniature motors, the sensor-points, but I don't remember the half of it. I'm no engineer, anyway. It fascinates me enough, just to watch my hand moving, to feel it move, as I write.

If writing seemed pointless before, it is utterly ridiculous, now. With these hands I can do things as never before. They are strong, accurate, absolutely steady, and quite tireless. So is all the rest of this body of mine. I've seen it. In a mirror. It looks almost normal. I was not as handsome as this before, but the likeness is there. Odd little things would give me away, if you knew what to look for. My colour doesn't change. My lips and mouth are dry. I still can't spit, or taste, or smell. My eye-pupils don't alter. A doctor would wonder that I don't have a pulse. But the layman would never know. And who cares, anyway? I shall spend all my private hours in walking, sitting down, getting up, turning, picking things up, putting them down again, dressing, undressing—learning my new self. I wonder how far the power will stretch, away from the transmitter? I must ask Doc.

## four

*Thursday, November 11th.* Today was bad. Very bad. It is almost eleven p.m. and I am still not sure what I ought to do. It is easy to make decisions on reason, alone, but when those decisions affect people, then feelings are involved. And I have no feelings. I have sensations, true, but they are not the same thing at all. This is not 'me,' this beautiful body they have made. This is 'me' being aware of being in a body, which isn't the same thing at all. Before all this happened I was never aware of being a 'something' with a body. I just was. Now I'm something different and the difference is considerable. For this once, I'm glad of the old diary, and now that I can see what I'm writing perhaps it will help to straighten out my confusion.

This morning we went out. Myself, Doctor Gabriel and Sir Andrew. And Mark Stevens, one of the directors of Ungar. He didn't say a word all through. I think he was there just to keep an eye on his property. Anyway, we went to New Scotland Yard, a place I'd never even seen before. And I couldn't begin to describe it, even now, because we were out of the car and into the building without wasting any time at all. Then it was corridors, offices, noises, people going to and fro, a thousand sensations to pile on top of all those I had snatched greedily at during the swift car-ride. The streets, the noises, all that traffic—and I daren't let any of it go by without soaking it up. Silly, everyday things, but precious to me.

Sir Andrew used his name and influence to get us all the way up to the Assistant Commissioner in short order. I liked him. A grey-haired very distinguished old chap. Very controlled and military. And patient. Sir Cyril Coke, a good listener and extremely quick. Croxley did most of the explaining. He put the matter very briefly, without giving too much away about me. He hit the danger of the drug very strongly, stressed the absolute need for secrecy and urgency and the A.C. absorbed it all in quiet silence. Then he turned to me.

" You're quite sure you can identify those two men ? "

" Absolutely certain. I'll know those two faces if ever I see them again. The big one was in charge. The small one was called 'Ches.' And they did not expect, nor want, to be seen." He nodded and hummed a bit.

" Little enough to go on, but it's a help. And it sounds as if they knew they'd be easy to trace. Stun-guns, of course, are common. Absolutely illegal, as you know, but when did a

thing like that ever stop a criminal ? Right, I'll just have a word with C.R.O., and see what they have to offer," and he turned to his intercom screen and dialled. I gave him what description I could, to narrow down their search a bit, and when that was done he instructed the staff at the other end to get on with it. We had a wait of about ten minutes, which Croxley and Coke spent in chat. Apparently they'd been to the same school together or something like that. Anyway, the intercom buzzed, the screen lit up again and the officer at the other end began flashing pictures.

'Ches' came up first, after about fifteen minutes. I spotted him at once, and the C.R.O. officer sounded pleased.

"That's who we thought it might be, from the description. Larry Chester. That makes it almost certain that the other one will be Charley Leggatt. They go together. Breaking and entering, stealing anything they can find. Specialists in dodging burglar-proof gadgets, thief-proof locks, spy-rays, that kind of thing. A very crafty pair." The pictures ran on for a further twenty minutes, until they showed up the second thug and I stopped them. It was Leggatt, sure enough. The C.R.O., man was more pleased than ever.

"I'll check you back in a moment, sir. I may be wrong, but I believe we have Leggatt inside at this moment, on a breaking charge." There was a brief wait, then, "Yes, sir. Leggatt is in custody. If you wish, I can shoot him along to you in about fifteen minutes." The A.C. did wish. He was very pleased. But as soon as the screen was dark, he warned us.

"This might be very difficult, gentlemen. Supposing Leggatt knows who his employer was, and that is by no means certain—he may not decide to talk. And we have no way of making him. If we are to uphold the law, then we have to be ruled by it, also. I can't even threaten him, not without making an official case of it, and you don't want that, do you ? So don't count on too much." At that, I felt bold enough to put in a suggestion of my own.

"This man," I said, "firmly believes that he killed me. He knows he did. He knows that, apart from me, Chester is the only other person who knows anything of what happened. So, if we could manage a screen of some kind, and me behind it, so that he can't see me. And just let me talk to him. I'd want to see him, just a peep, to make sure . . ." Well, the A.C. didn't like this at all. He said it was all dreadfully unorthodox and theatrical. But he agreed in the end.

I knew Leggatt the moment I heard his voice. No need to look at him. He was as cocky as the devil to start with, but a trifle uneasy when Sir Cyril asked the two warders to wait outside. Then the date was mentioned. The evening of Monday, June the 14th.

"Don't remember," Leggatt said, promptly. "That's ancient history, guv. I ain't got that kind of a memory."

"That was the night," Sir Cyril Coke said, quietly, "that you broke into the Ungar Biochemical Research Establishment —you and Larry Chester. You stunned the nightwatchman. You took the storekeeper prisoner. You forced him to reveal to you the method of operating the data-storage system. You acquired a secret formula. And you remember what you did next, don't you, Leggatt?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Leggatt denied, but his voice was thick with fear. That was my cue. I started to talk, and I think he recognised my voice, artificial though it is. I took him through it, step by step, word for word, up to the moment when they cast me into the vat—and he screamed, like an animal in a trap. I fancy the memory of what he had done had come back to bite on his soul, boot-leather though it might be, during the long months in between. Then I came out from behind the screen, and let him see me. And he went down on his knees, gibbering with fright. Then the warders came and took him away—but he had told us what we wanted to know. The name of his employer. It was a *big* name. Sir Cyril broke the strained silence, to put the matter in a nutshell.

"We can't touch *him*," he said. "We've had our suspicions for a long time, on various things. But it's not enough. Leggatt's evidence isn't worth a straw. You can't give evidence, in any case. Nothing we can do."

"You mean, we can't do anything at all?" Croxley demanded.

"Didn't mean that," Coke corrected. "What I mean is, this is not a simple matter. We'll get him, never fear, in time. But it will take time. We must have solid, substantial evidence. Something we can take to court. I'll get Interpol on it. Every man I can spare will be on the job. There'll be eyes on him, day and night, watching his every movement, every contact. We'll get him. But it will take time."

"Time is the one thing we cannot spare," Croxley pointed out, angrily. "You don't seem to understand, Coke. Look

here, a three-ounce bottle of this stuff, on a once-a-year injection basis, would last the right man a hundred years or more. It's easy to make up. It breaks into three fractions. Any corner-end chemist can make them. And it takes about fifteen minutes to find out whether you're going to be the right man or not. If not, you die, or go insane. But, if you are the right man, then you're in. You're a member of the most ungodly and powerful clique this old world has ever seen.

"How long will it take to find out that a man isn't getting older as he should? About twenty years, I'd say. Possibly more. And, by that time, you have a secret coterie of immortals, all subservient to *him*. Dependant on him for their very lives. You can bet that he won't give the secret away. He's not such a fool. You can also bet that there will be no shortage of customers, despite the fearful risk. I know a lot of people who would think it well worth the gamble. Sudden death—or immortality. I tell you, time is the one thing we do not have. It is imperative that we get him, the formula, his stocks of stuff—as quickly as possible." It was a good speech, but it didn't shake Sir Cyril.

"I appreciate everything you've said, Croxley. But the facts must be faced. We are the law. We uphold the law. Therefore we are bound by the law. And, by law, we cannot touch him—yet. We dare not even let him know that we as much as suspect him. I must ask you, all of you, to be absolutely discreet about this."

And that was that. He had his secretary bring us coffee and liqueurs, to smooth off the rough edges a bit. I couldn't accept the refreshments, of course. I might have made a stab at smoking the cigar that was offered, but I didn't try. I felt a fool, and frustrated. All the worry, the effort, all that I had gone through, was for nothing. The law!

There was something else, though. Sir Cyril's secretary was something very special. Very attractive, and wearing the very latest in fashion-changes. A sort of all over garment as sheer as a nylon stocking, and as close-fitting, with applied patches of heavy velvet here and there. I've never been able to keep a track of the various modes or the point of them. What man ever could? All I can say is that this flattered her shape, all over, the way nylon stockings do a fine leg. But the bit that hurt was that my admiration was all academic. I didn't feel

anything. That was when my thoughts began to get muddled. And they are still muddled.

I'm not a man at all. I'm just a brain, inside a metal and plastic automaton. A beautiful, semi-nude girl smiles at me—and I admire her teeth ! Is this the way it is going to be ? Is this all I am ? Is life—libido—the urge to exist—is it purely a thing of the body ? I have been deceiving myself that I felt sympathy and affection for Doctor Gabriel, anger and loathing for *him*, a detestation for Leggatt—but there wasn't anything there, really, but words. Just rationalisations of what I ought to feel. And don't. That girl proved it. I can see her now. Bright-eyed, slim, beautiful, shapely—but nothing. Just a 'seeing.' No 'feeling' at all. So much for this wonderful body of mine with its sensations. This isn't Johnny Dawson. This is just a frame, with Johnny's memories trapped inside. So what else am I, but a bowl-ful of memories ? And, whatever I am, what's law, to me ?

That's the point, at last. The law—it means nothing to me. I don't even exist, legally. Laws are for people not for me. That's it. At last it is coming clear. I know what I must do, now.

*Friday, November 12th.* Dear Doctor Gabriel. It is early in the morning. If you have read as far as this, and I think you will, I feel sure that *you* will understand that I have done what I had to do and what no-one else could have done in quite the same way. At any rate, I will leave this where you will find it and hope that you will understand.

Last night, just on midnight, I left this room, which has been my world, all by myself. I went out through the window. I know that it is high and that I might have fallen, but I didn't care. I had *his* address safely locked away in my brain. In the beginning, I think, I just wanted to see him, to see the man who was originally responsible for all that had happened to me. His house is in Roehampton, a long way from here. I was down into the Lambeth Road and safely clear, before it occurred to me to wonder how I was going to get as far as Roehampton. I had no money. Somehow it never crossed my mind to think of money. At any rate, I ran. You told me, remember, that the power-broadcast was effective at full strength for as far as ten miles and began to fail beyond that. I had no clear idea how far I had to go but I determined to go as far as I could.

This is a magnificent body. It runs swiftly, easily, and without tiring. It was a thrilling experience, by itself, running through the night. I felt that I might own the whole world if I chose. I need no sleep. I never forget anything. I am not swayed by emotions, not any longer. And I am almost indestructible. You told me that. These were some of the odd thoughts that went through my mind as I ran through the night. I found the house easily enough. He is well established. The grounds alone would accommodate a hundred small families. The outside wall was nothing. Nor was the window I opened. And I can see quite well, in almost no light at all. Did you know that? You must have guessed, as you taught me how to adjust my perception-levels at will.

Anyway, I found my way through the house. Great old rooms, thick carpets, rare furniture, masterpieces hanging on the walls. I imagine they were masterpieces, anyway. A library, a dining-room, a whole series of rooms—Lord knows what one man would find to do with so many—and I was absolutely silent. I can do that, you know. Something the ordinary man can't do. He must breathe. It took a machine to catch me. Yes, I was caught. I heard the alarm go off, although it was upstairs and several rooms away. I was in a study. His study, as I was later to find.

I heard him get out of bed, felt him coming down the stairs, and I waited for him to find me. For a moment I wondered if he would summon servants. But he didn't. I found out why. He told me. I saw him come sneaking through the door, tiptoeing like a cat, with a stun-gun in his hand, and his other hand going for the light-switch. On it went, and he stood, screwing up his eyes and grinning. Gloating, I should say.

"Keep quite still," he ordered, in a smooth, silky voice. "You're a fool to have come this far. Don't make it worse by trying anything desperate." He was a little man, not as old-looking as I had expected, and smooth-faced, almost vapid. He would have passed for the typical 'silly-ass' of musical comedy except for his eyes, which were like chilled steel. Comfortably plump, very well cared for and immensely sure of himself. The gun in his hand was as steady as a stone.

"Now," he said. "Who are you, and what d'you think you've come for? You might as well tell it all to me. It will be for me to decide whether I send for the law—or not." He moved to a chair and sat, inviting me to do the same, but I

remained standing. He nodded at that. "If you're thinking of making a dash for it, my man, I can put that idea out of your head at once. I designed the defences of this house. Once I set the traps, almost anyone can get in, but I defy the devil himself to get out again. I can't even get out myself, until I phone a certain secret code signal to the master control point outside. By this phone." He indicated a red instrument on his desk.

"And—anything *but* the correct signal will bring law and order to the scene on the double. You see? And I am the *only* one who knows the correct set of signals. I have it here," and he tapped his forehead. Somehow, that gesture and his whole cold confidence, they set the seal on my intentions. At that moment, I made up my mind what I was going to do.

"I am John Ellis Dawson," I said, flatly. "I am the man who was destroyed by your paid thugs when they broke into the Croxley Bio-Chemical Research Establishment and stole the 'youth hormone' formula for you. I came here just to see what sort of a man you are." His smooth face had hardened. For just a moment, he was surprised. Then he laughed.

"The man who was destroyed, eh? You look remarkably fit and healthy to me. As for all that business about thugs—Croxley—hormones—I don't know what you're talking about. You'll have to do better than that."

"I will," I said, "but first, tell me, is this talk being recorded?"

"Ha!" he laughed again. "You take me for a fool? Nothing is ever recorded in this house. I trust no-one, not even servants. I have none. All my wants are taken care of by servo-mechanisms." This was better than had I hoped.

"Very well," I said. "I *was* destroyed but my brain was spared. It was preserved, cared for, equipped with a new, a mechanical body. This body. *You* did this to me. Now it's my turn. You've heard of Frankenstein's monster and how it turned and destroyed its maker?" He had gone pale, but was still firm.

"I don't believe it. You're trying some game, trying to trick me in some stupid way. A brain—in a robot body! Bah! You must think I'm simple."

"I'll show you," I said, and went to the desk, standing right across from him. I put my hand on the red telephone.

"Don't touch that, you fool!" he gnarled, getting up.  
"You'll have the police here in ten minutes!"

"I think not," I said, concentrating on what I was doing. Then I lifted my hand about an inch and smashed it down as hard as I could. I knew that this body was strong. I knew that the instrument would be shattered. I wanted to shock him. I shocked myself. My hand went down through the instrument, bursting it to shards. But it kept on going, down through the top of the desk, down to the elbow, before I could regain my balance and stop it. Then I dragged my hand free and looked at him. He had withered, his face grey and slack, his hand shaking.

"Now—" I said, "—do you believe?" For a while, he couldn't work his voice. His mouth was writhing and twisted.

"You—you devil—" he ground out, and began firing the stunner. It was an odd sensation, standing there, watching him pressing the trigger. His lips had curled back over his teeth, giving him a rat-like look. Drool trickled from the corner of his mouth. His finger kept clenching on the stud. I could see the spark jumping, down there in the dark tunnel of the muzzle. I could even hear the faint buzz of it. But I felt nothing but a slight tingle and my vision shifted towards the red with each blast. That's all. Seven or eight times he pressed. Then the mercury cells were flat. It was exhausted and he knew it. With a cry like an animal he threw it at me and missed. It must be lying there, on the carpet, still.

Then he died, but not before he had told me where the formula was, that he had no copy, that he had only one bottle of the stuff made up at a time and where it was—and a list of all those who had bought it from him, and used it successfully. The formula and the list you will find in my desk drawer. The stuff itself I destroyed, poured it away down a drain. I broke out of the house. With this body it was easy, almost too easy. And I came home.

Doctor Gabriel, it may seem that I am repaying kindness and devotion with selfishness and ingratitude but the truth is that I am afraid. I am just an ordinary person, inside. You have made me into a colossus, almost a god—and yet a nothing. I can do almost anything, yet I am nothing. I feel nothing except sensations. I am not alive, in any real sense. I don't want to go on living like this. I dare not. Tonight I have

killed a man and it means nothing to me but the words. He deserved to die. I 'feel' that that is enough but my mind tells me that it is not. There should be more and I haven't got it.

I have worked out a way to pull the master-fuse from the power-unit which keeps me alive. I fully realise that when I do, not only will my body cease to work, and my sense leave me, but also that the delicate mechanisms which care for and keep my brain alive—will fail, too. So, this time, I shall really die. I am sorry to run away like this, but what else can I do ? What good am I ? Goodbye, Doctor Gabriel.

The old man shut the diary carefully and sat, blinking his old eyes free of their painful tears. Mark Stevens found him still sitting there when he came in with Sir Andrew Croxley.

"Well?" Croxley demanded. Gabriel handed him the diary

"Read this before you start to jump," he said. "Johnny left here, last night. Through the window. He got the formula back, destroyed all the stuff, and the man responsible, all by himself."

"That lets us out," Stevens grunted. "Good work, I'd say. Smart lad."

"Smart, yes!" Gabriel turned to Sir Andrew, who was holding the book, and frowning, thoughtfully.

"You mean . . ." he muttered, ". . . that he's killed the chap? That's murder, whichever way you look at it. The police . . ."

"The police will never find out who did it," Gabriel said, softly. "And if they did—so? Johnny Dawson is dead, remember? What we have is a machine with a brain. You can try that, convict it, hang it by the neck until dead—? Can you? Read his own words and think it over." Croxley shuddered, breathed a shivering breath.

"Good God!" he whispered. "It's a devilish thought." Gabriel watched them go out, and sighed.

"Yes—" he murmured. "God—it is a dangerous thought, that." He went across to the power-unit console, undid three catches and lifted a lid. There, in a plastic bowl, lay the convoluted mass that was Johnny Dawson. The nutrient fluids pulsed and moved, gently, driven by their own, independent power-supply.

"Poor Johnny," he sighed. "You thought your brain was in there, in that body. But no. There wasn't any room—not room enough to put a real man in that body, only room for the power. You, the real you, was safely here all the time,

controlling that monster by remote signals. It was the only way. Sleep well, my Johnny, wherever you are. I shall be calling you back again soon. I have a letter here, Johnny, from a friend of mine, about a girl. I wish you could read it. She was a cripple, paralysed, all her life. Then the little home where she lived caught fire, Johnny, and she was burned very badly. But she was unconscious. So her brain was not hurt, you see. And it is still alive. My friend would like me to help him to make a body for her, like I did for you. And I am going to try. I think when I am ready, I will ask you to help me, Johnny—and her. I think you will like that. Then you will not say, any more ‘What good am I?’ So, it is not goodbye, Johnny. Only ‘au revoir.’ You will be coming back. You see, if you can do anything, it is just as easy to do good.”

—John Rackham

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*It is one thing to send an advance colonist to prepare a new world—but quite another to have him met by a commercial traveller from another system.*

# COMPANY STORE

by ROBERT SILVERBERG

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## one

Colonist Roy Wingert gripped his blaster with shaky hands. He took dead aim at the slimy wormlike creatures wriggling behind his newly-deposited pile of crates.

*They told me this planet was uninhabited,* he thought. *Hah!*

He yanked back the firing stud. A spurt of violet light leaped out.

His nostrils caught the smell of roasting alien flesh. Shuddering, Wingert turned away from the mess before him, in time to see four more of the wormlike beings writhing toward him from the rear.

He ashed those. Two more dangled invitingly from a thick-boled tree at his left.

Getting into the spirit of the thing now, Wingert turned the beam on them, too. The clearing was beginning to look like the vestibule of an abattoir. Sweat ran down Wingert's face. His stomach was starting to get queasy, and his skin was cold at the prospect of spending his three-year tour on Quellac doing nothing but finishing off these overgrown night-crawlers.

Two more of them were wriggling out of a decaying log near his feet. They were nearly six feet long, with saw-edged teeth glistening in Quellac's bright sunlight. *Nothing very dangerous*, Wingert thought grimly. *Ho!* He recharged the blaster and roasted the two newcomers.

Loud noises behind him persuaded him to turn. Something very much like a large grey toad, seven or eight feet high and mostly mouth, was hopping toward him through the forest. It was about thirty yards away now. It looked very hungry.

Squaring his shoulders, Wingert prepared to defend himself against this new assault. But just as he started to depress the firing stud, a motion to his far right registered in the corner of his eye. *Another* of the things—approaching rapidly from the opposite direction.

"Pardon me, sir," a sharp crackling voice said suddenly. "You seem to be in serious straits. May I offer you the use of this Duarm Pocket Force-Field Generator in this emergency? The cost is only—"

Wingert gasped. "*Damn* the cost! Turn the thing on! Those toads are only twenty feet away!"

"Of course, sir."

Wingert heard a click, and abruptly a shimmering blue bubble of force sprang up around them. The two onrushing pseudo-toads cracked soundly into it and were thrown back.

Wingert staggered over to one of the packing-cases and sat down limply. He was soaked with sweat from head to foot.

"Thanks," he said. "You saved my life. But who the hell are you, and where'd you come from?"

"Permit me to introduce myself. I am XL-ad41, a new-model Vending and Distributing Robot manufactured on Densobol II. I arrived here not long ago, and, perceiving your plight—"

Wingert saw now that the creature was indeed a robot, roughly humanoid except for a heavy pair of locomotory treads. "Hold on! Let's go back to the beginning." The toad-things were eyeing him hungrily from outside the force-field. "You say you're a new-model *what*?"

"Vending and Distributing Robot. It is my function to diffuse through the civilized galaxy the goods and supplies manufactured by my creators, Associated Artisans of Densobol II." The robot's rubberised lips split in an oily smile. "I am, you might say, a mechanised Travelling Salesman. Are you from Terra, perhaps?"

"Yes, but—"

"I thought as much. By comparing your physical appearance with the phenotype data in my memory banks I reached the conclusion that you were of Terran origin. The confirmation you have just given is most gratifying."

"Glad to hear it. Densobol II is in the Magellanic Cluster, isn't it? Lesser or Greater Cloud?"

"Lesser. One matter puzzles me, though. In view of your Terran origin, it seems odd that you didn't respond when I mentioned that I am a travelling salesman."

Wingert frowned. "How was I supposed to respond? Clap my hands and wriggle my ears?"

"You were supposed to show humour-response. According to my files on Terra, mention of travelling salesmen customarily strikes upon a common well of folklore implanted in the subconscious, thereby inducing a conscious humour-reaction."

"Sorry," Wingert apologised. "I'm afraid I never was too interested in Earth. That's why I signed on with Planetary Colonization."

"Ah, yes. I had just concluded that your failure to show response to standard folklore indicated some fundamental dislocation of your position relative to your cultural *gestalt*. Again, confirmation is gratifying. As an experimental model, I'm subject to careful monitoring by my makers. I'm anxious to demonstrate my capabilities as a salesman."

Wingert had almost completely recovered from his earlier exertions. He eyed the two toad-beings uneasily and said, "That force-field generator—that's one of the things you sell?"

"The Duarm Generator is one of our finest products. It's strictly one-way, you know. *They* can't get in, but you can still fire at them."

"What? Why didn't you tell me that long ago?" Wingert drew his blaster and disposed of the toad-creatures with two well-placed shots.

"That's that," he said. "I guess I sit inside this force-field and wait for the next ones, now."

"Oh, they won't be along for a while," the robot said lightly. "The creatures that attacked you are native to the next continent. They're not found here at all."

"Then how'd they get here?"

"I brought them," the robot said sunnily. "I collected the most hostile creatures I could find on this world, and left

them in your vicinity in order to demonstrate the necessity for the Duarm Force-field Generat—”

“ You brought them ?” Wingert rose and advanced on the robot menacingly. “ Deliberately, as a sales stunt ? They could have killed and eaten me !”

“ On the contrary. I was controlling the situation, as you saw. When matters became serious I intervened.”

“ Get out of here !” Wingert raged. “ Go on, you crazy robot ! I have to set up my bubble. Go !”

“ But you owe me—”

“ We’ll settle up later. Get going, *fast* !”

The robot got. Wingert watched it scuttle off into the underbrush.

He tried to control his rage. Angry as he was, he felt a certain amusement at the robot’s crude sales tactics. It was clever, in a coarse way, to assemble a collection of menacing aliens and arrive at the last minute to supply the force-field. But when you poison a man in order to sell him the antidote, you *don’t* boast about it afterward to the victim !

He glanced speculatively at the forest, hoping the robot had told the truth. He didn’t care to spend his entire tour on Quellac fighting off dangerous beasts.

The generator was still operating; Wingert studied it and found a cam that widened the field. He expanded it to a thirty-yard radius and left it that way. The clearing was littered with alien corpses.

Wingert shuddered.

Well, now that amusement was over, it was time to get down to business. He had been on Quellac just an hour, and had spent most of that time fighting for his life.

The Colonists’ Manual said, “ *The first step for a newly-arrived colonist is to install his Matter-Transmitter.* ” Wingert closed the book and peered at the scattered pile of crates that were his possessions until he spied the large yellow box labelled *Matter-Transmitter, Handle with Care.* ”

From the box marked *Tools* he took a crowbar and delicately pried a couple of planks out of the packing-crate. A silvery metallic object was visible within. Wingert hoped the Matter-Transmitter was in working order; it was his most important possession, his sole link to far-off Terra.

The Manual said, “ *All necessities of life will be sent via matter-transmitter without cost.* ” Wingert smiled. Necessities

of life? He could have magneboots, cigars, senso tapes, low-power short-range matter-transmitters, dream pellets, bottled Martinis and nuclear fizzes, simply by requisitioning them. All the comforts of home. They had told him working for Planetary Colonisation was rugged, but it was hardly that. Not with the Matter-Transmitter to take the sting out of pioneering.

*Unless, Wingert thought gloomily, that lunatic robot brings some more giant toads over from the next continent.*

Wingert opened the packing crate and bared the Matter-Transmitter. It looked, he thought, like an office-desk with elephantiasis of the side drawers; they bulged grotesquely, aproning out into shovel-shaped platforms, one labelled "Send" and the other "Receive."

An imposing-looking array of dials and meters completed the machine's face. Wingert located the red Activator Stud along the north perimeter and jammed it down.

The Matter-Transmitter came quiveringly to life.

Dials clicked; meters registered. The squarish device seemed to have taken on existence of its own. The view-screen flickered polychromatically, then cleared.

A mild pudgy face stared out at Wingert.

"Hello. I'm Smathers, from the Earth Office. I'm the company contact man for Transmitters AZ-1061 right through BF-80. Can I have your name, registry number, and co-ordinates?"

"Roy Wingert, Number 76-032-10f3. The name of this planet is Quellac, and I don't know the co-ordinates offhand. If you'll give me a minute to check my contract—"

"No need of that," Smathers said. "Just let me have the serial-number of your Matter-Transmitter. It's inscribed on the plate along the west perimeter."

Wingert found it after a moment's search. "AZ-1142."

"That checks. Well, welcome to the Company, Colonist Wingert. How's your planet?"

"Not so good," Wingert said.

"How so?"

"It's inhabited. By hostile aliens. And my contract said I was being sent to an uninhabited world."

"Read it again, Colonist Wingert. As I recall, it simply said you would meet no hostile creatures where *you* were."

Our survey team reported some difficulties on the wild continent to your west, but—”

“ You see these dead things here?”

“ Yes.”

“ I killed them. To save my own neck. They attacked me about a minute after the Company ship dropped me off here.”

“ They’re obviously strays from that other continent,” Smathers said. “ Most unusual. Be sure to report any further difficulties of this sort.”

“ Sure,” Wingert said. “ Big comfort that is.”

“ To change the subject,” Smathers said frigidly, “ I wish to remind you that the Company stands ready to serve you. In the words of the contract, ‘ *All necessities of life will be sent via Matter-Transmitter.*’ That’s in the Manual too. Would you care to make your first order now? The Company is extremely anxious that its employees are well taken care of.”

Wingert frowned. “ Well, I haven’t even unpacked, you know. I don’t think I need anything yet—except—yes! Send me some old-fashioned razor-blades, will you? And a tube of shaving cream. I forgot to pack mine in, and I can’t stand these new vibro-shaves.”

Smathers emitted a suppressed chuckle. “ You’re not going to grow a beard?”

“ No,” Wingert said stiffly. “ They itch.”

“ Very well, then. I’ll have the routing desk ship a supply of blades and cream to Machine AZ-1142. So long for now, Colonist Wingert, and good luck. The Company sends its best wishes.

“ Thanks,” Wingert said sourly. “ Same to you.”

He turned away from the blank screen and glanced beyond the confines of the force-field. All seemed quiet, so he snapped off the generator.

Quellac, he thought, had the makings of a darned fine world, except for the beasts on the western continent. The planet was Earth-type, sixth in orbit around a small yellow main-sequence star. The soil was red with iron-salts, but looked fertile enough, judging from the thick vegetation pushing up all around. Not far away a sluggish little stream wound through a sloping valley and vanished in a hazy cloud of purple mist near the horizon.

It would be a soft enough life, he thought, if no more toads showed up. Or worms with teeth.

The contract specified that his job was to "prepare and otherwise survey the world assigned, for the purpose of admitting future colonists under the auspices of Planetary Colonisation, Inc." He was an advance agent, sent out by the Company to smooth the bugs out of the planet before the regular colonists arrived.

For this they gave him 1,000 dollars a month, plus "necessities of life" via Matter-Transmitter.

There were worse ways of making a living, Wingert told himself.

A lazy green-edged cloud was drifting over the forest. He pushed aside a blackened alien husk and sprawled out on the warm red soil, leaning against the Matter-Transmitter's comforting bulk. Before him were the eight or nine crates containing his equipment and possessions.

He had made the three-week journey from Earth to Quellac aboard the first-class liner *Mogred*. Matter-transmission would have been faster, but a Transmitter could handle a bulk of 150 pounds, which was Wingert's weight, only in three 50-pound instalments. That idea didn't appeal to him. Besides, there had been no Matter-Transmitter set up on Quellac to receive him, which made the whole problem fairly academic.

A bird sang softly. Wingert yawned. It was early afternoon, and he didn't feel impatient to set up his shelter. The Manual said it took but half an hour to unpack. Later, then, when the sun was sinking behind those cerise mountains, he would blow his bubble-home and unpack his goods. Right now he just wanted to relax, to let the tension of that first fierce encounter drain away.

"Pardon me, sir," said a familiar sharp voice. "I happened to overhear that order for razor blades, and I think it's only fair to inform you that I carry a product of much greater face-appeal."

Wingert was on his feet in an instant, glaring at the robot. "I told you to go away. A-W-A-Y."

Undisturbed, the robot produced a small translucent tube filled with a glossy green paste. "This," XL-ad41 said, "is Gloglam's Depilating Fluid, twelve units—ah, one dollar, that is—per tube."

Wingert shook his head. "I get my goods free, from Terra. Besides, I like to shave with a razor. Please go away."

The robot looked about as crestfallen as a robot could possibly look. "You don't seem to understand that your refusal to purchase from me reflects adversely on my abilities, and may result in my being dismantled at the end of this test. Therefore I insist you approach my merchandise with an open mind."

A sudden grin of salesman-like inspiration illuminated XL-ad41's face. "I'll take the liberty of offering you this free sample. Try Goglam's Depilating Fluid and I can guarantee you'll never use a blade-razor again."

The robot poured a small quantity of the green fluid into a smaller vial and handed it to Wingert. "Here. I'll return shortly to hear your decision."

The robot departed, trampling down the shrubbery with its massive treads. Wingert scratched his stubbly chin and regarded the vial quizzically.

Goglam's Depilating Fluid, eh? And XL-ad41, the robot travelling salesman. He smiled wryly. On Earth they bombarded you with singing commercials, and here in the wilds of deep space robots from Densobol came descending on you trying to sell shaving-cream.

Well, if the robot salesman were anything like its Terran counterparts, the only way he'd be able to get rid of it would be by buying something from it. And particularly since the poor robot seemed to be on a trial run, and might be destroyed if it didn't make sales. As a one-time salesman himself, Wingert felt sympathy.

Cautiously he squeezed a couple of drops of Goglam's Depilating Fluid into his palm and rubbed it against one cheek. The stuff was cool and slightly sharp, with a pleasant twang. He rubbed it in for a moment, wondering if it might be going to dissolve his jawbone, then pulled out his pocket mirror.

His face was neat and pink where he'd applied the depilator. He hadn't had such a good shave in years. Enthusiastically he rubbed the remainder of the tube on his face, thereby discovering that the robot had given him just enough to shave one cheek and most of his chin.

Wingert chuckled. Bumbling and pedantic it might be, but the creature knew a little basic salesmanship, at least.

"Well?" XL-ad41 asked, reappearing as if beckoned. "Are you satisfied?"

Grinning, Wingert said, "That was pretty sly—giving me enough to shave half my face, I mean. But the stuff is good; there's no denying that."

"How many tubes will you take?"

Wingert pulled out his billfold. He had brought only 16 dollars with him; he hadn't expected to have any use for Terran currency on Quellac, but there had been a ten, a five, and a one in his wallet at blastoff time.

"One tube," he said. He handed the robot the tattered single. XL-ad41 bowed courteously, reached into a pectoral compartment, and drew out the remainder of the tube he had shown Wingert before.

"Uh-uh," the Earthman said quickly. "That's the tube you took the sample from—and the sample was supposed to be free. I want a full tube."

"The proverbial innate shrewdness of the Terran," XL-ad41 observed mournfully. "I defer to it."

It gave a second tube to Wingert, who examined it and slid it into his tunic. "And now, if you'll excuse me, I have some unpacking to do," Wingert said.

He strode around the smiling robot, grabbed the crowbar, and began opening the crate that housed his bubble-home. Suddenly the Matter-Transmitter emitted a series of loud buzzes followed by a dull *clonk*.

"Your machine has delivered something," XL-ad41 ventured.

Wingert lifted the lid of the "*Receive*" platform and drew out a small package wrapped neatly in plastofil. He peeled away the wrapping.

Within was a box containing twenty-four double-edged blades, a tube of shaving cream, and a bill folded lengthwise. Wingert read it:

<i>Razor blades, as ordered</i>	..	..	..	..	\$00.23
<i>Shaving cream, as ordered</i>	..	..	..	..	00.77
<i>Charge for transportation</i>	..	..	..	..	50.00
					<hr/>
			<i>Total</i>	..	\$51.00

"You look pale," the robot said. "Perhaps you have some disease. You might be interested in purchasing the Derblong Self-Calibrating Medical Autodiagnostical Servomechanism, which I happen to—"

"No," Wingert said grimly. "I don't need anything like that. Get out of my way."

He stalked back to the Transmitter and jabbed down savagely on the Activator Stud. A moment later Smathers' bland voice said, "Hello, Colonist Wingert. Something wrong?"

"There sure is," Wingert said in a strangled voice. "My razor-blades just showed up—with a 50 dollar bill for transportation! What kind of racket is this, anyway? I was told that you'd ship my supplies out free of charge. It says in the contract—"

"The contract says," Smathers interrupted smoothly, "that all necessities of life will be transmitted without cost, Colonist Wingert. It makes no mention of free supply of luxuries. The Company would be unable to bear the crushing financial burden of transporting any and all luxury items a colonist might desire."

"Razor blades are luxury items?" Wingert choked back an impulse to kick the Transmitter's control-panel in. "How can you have the audacity to call razor blades *luxury items*?"

"Most colonists let their beards grow," Smathers said. "Your reluctance to do so, Colonist Wingert, is your own affair. The Company—"

"I know. The Company cannot be expected to bear the crushing financial burden. Okay," Wingert said. "In the future I'll be more careful about what I order. And as for now, take these damned razor blades back and cancel the requisition." He dumped the package in the "*Send*" bin and depressed the control stud.

"I'm sorry you did that," Smathers said. "It will now be necessary for us to assess you an additional 50 dollars to cover return shipping."

"*What?*"

"However," Smathers went on, "we'll see to it after this that you're notified in advance any time there may be a shipping charge on goods sent to you."

"Thanks," Wingert said hoarsely.

"Since you don't want razor blades, I presume you're going to grow a beard. I rather thought you would. Most colonists do, you know."

"I'm not growing any beards. Some vending robot from the Densobol system wandered through here about ten minutes ago and sold me a tube of depilating paste."

Smather's eyes nearly popped. "You'll have to cancel that purchase," he said, his voice suddenly stern.

Wingert stared incredulously at the pudgy face in the screen. "Now you're going to interfere with that, *too?*"

"Purchasing supplies from anyone but the Company is a gross violation of your Contract, Colonist Wingert! It makes you subject to heavy penalty! After all, we agreed to supply you with your needs. For you to call in an outside supplier is to rob the Company of its privilege of serving you, Colonist Wingert. You see?"

Wingert was silent for almost a minute, too dizzy with rage to frame his words. Finally he said, "So I get charged 50 dollars shipping costs every time I requisition razor blades from you people, but if I try to buy depilating paste on my own it violates my contract? Why, that's—that's usury! Slavery! It's illegal!"

The voice from the Matter-Transmitter coughed warningly. "Powerful accusations, Colonist Wingert. I suggest that before you hurl any more abuse at the Company you read your contract more carefully."

"I don't give a damn about the contract! I'll buy anywhere I please!"

Smathers grinned triumphantly. "I was afraid you'd say that. You realise that you've now given us legal provocation to slap a spybeam on you in order to make sure you don't cheat us by violating your contract?"

Wingert sputtered. "Spybeam? But—I'll smash your accursed Transmitter! *Then* try to spy on me!"

"We won't be able to," Smathers conceded. "But destroying a Transmitter is a serious felony, punishable by heavy fine. Good afternoon, Colonist Wingert."

"Hey! Come back here! You can't—"

Wingert punched the Activator Stud three times, but Smathers had broken the contact and would not re-open it.

Scowling, Wingert turned away and sat down on the edge of a crate.

"Can I offer you a box of Sugrath Anti-Choler Tranquillising Pills?" XL-ad41 said helpfully. "Large economy size."

"Shut up and leave me alone!"

Wingert stared moodily at the shiny tips of his boots. The Company, he thought, had him sewed up neatly. He had no money and no way of returning to Earth short of dividing himself into three equal chunks and teleporting. And though Quellac was an attractive planet, it lacked certain aspects of Earth. Tobacco, for one. Wingert enjoyed smoking.

A box of cigars would be 2 dollars 40 cents plus 75 dollars shipping costs. And Smathers would smirk and tell him cigars were luxuries.

Sensotapes? Luxuries. Short-range transmitters? Maybe those came under the contract, since they were tools. But the pattern was clear. By the time his three-year tour was up, there would be 36,000 dollars in salary waiting in his account—minus the various accumulated charges. He'd be lucky if he came out owing less than 20,000 dollars.

Naturally, he wouldn't have that sort of money, and so the benevolent Company would offer a choice: either go to jail or take another three-year term to pay off your debt. So they'd ship him some place else, and at the end of that time he'd be in twice as deep.

Year after year he would sink further into debt, thanks to that damnable contract. He'd spend the rest of his life opening up new planets for Planetary Colonisations, Inc., and never have anything to show for it but a staggering debt.

It was worse than slavery.

There had to be some way out.

But after ransacking the contract for nearly an hour, Wingert concluded that it was airtight.

Angrily he glared up at the beaming robot.

"What are you hanging around here for? You've made your sale. Shove off!"

XL-ad41 shook its head. "You still owe me 500 dollars for the generator. And surely you can't expect me to return to my manufacturers after having made only two sales. Why, they'd turn me off in an instant and begin developing an XL-ad42!"

"Did you hear what Smathers said? I'll be violating my contract if they see me buying anything more from you. Go on, now. Take your generator back. The sale is cancelled. Visit some other planet; I'm in enough hot water as it is without—"

"Sorry," the robot said, and it seemed to Wingert that there was an ominous note in its mellow voice. "This is the

seventeenth planet I've called at since being sent forth by my manufacturers, and I have no sale to show for it but one tube of Gloglam Depilating Fluid. It's a poor record. I don't dare return yet."

"Try somewhere else, then. Find a planet full of suckers and give 'em the hard sell. I can't buy from you."

"I'm afraid you'll have to," the robot said mildly. "My specifications call for me to return to Densobol for inspection after my seventeenth visit." A panel in the robot's abdomen opened whirringly and Wingert saw the snout of a Molecular Disruptor emerge.

"The ultimate sales-tactic, eh? If the customer won't buy, pull a gun and *make* him buy. Except it won't work here. I haven't any money."

"Your friends on Terra will send some. I *must* return to Densobol with a successful sales record. Otherwise—"

"I know. They'll dismantle you."

"Correct. Therefore, I must approach you this way. And I fully intend to carry out my threat if you refuse."

"Hold on here!" a new voice cut in. "What's going on, Wingert?"

Wingert glanced at the Transmitter. The screen was lit, and Smather's plump face glared outward at him.

"It's this robot," Wingert said. "It's under some sort of sales-compulsion, and it just pulled a gun on me."

"I know. I saw the whole thing on the spybeam."

"I'm in a nice spot now," Wingert said dismally. He glanced from the waiting robot to the unsmiling Smathers. "If I don't buy from this robot, it'll murder me—and if I do buy anything, you'll spy it and fine me." Wingert wondered vaguely which would be worse.

"I stock many fine devices unknown on earth," the robot said proudly. "A Pioneer-Model Dreeg-Skinner, in case there are dreegs on Quellac—though frankly I doubt that. Or else you might want our Rotary Diatom-Strainer, or perhaps a new-model Hegley Neuronic Extractor—"

"Quiet," Wingert snapped. He turned back to Smathers. "Well, what do I do? You're the Company; protect your colonist from this marauding alien."

"We'll send you a weapon, Colonist Wingert."

"And have me try to outdraw a robot? You're a lot of help," Wingert said broodingly. Even if he escaped somehow

from this dilemma, he knew the Company still had him by the throat over the "Necessities of Life" clause. His accumulated shipping charges in three years would—

He sucked his breath in sharply. "Smathers?"

"Yes?"

"Listen to me: if I don't buy from the robot, it'll blast me with a Molecular Disruptor. But I *can't* buy from the robot, even if the Company would let me, because I don't have any money. Money's necessary if I want to stay alive. Get it? *Necessary?*"

"No," Smathers said, "I don't get it."

"What I'm saying is that the item I most need to preserve my life is money. It's a *necessity of life*. And therefore you have to supply me gratis with all the money I need, until this robot decides it's sold me enough. If you don't come through, I'll sue the Company for breach of contract."

Smathers grinned. "Try it. You'd be dead before you can contact a lawyer. The robot will kill you."

Sweat poured down Wingert's back, but he felt the moment of triumph approaching. Reaching inside his khaki shirt, he drew out the thick pseudo-parchment sheet that was his contract.

"You refuse! You refuse to supply a necessity of life! The contract," Wingert declared, "is therefore void." Before Smathers' horrified gaze he ripped the document up and tossed the pieces over his shoulder carelessly.

"Having broken your end of the contract," Wingert said, "you relieve me of all further obligations to the Company. Therefore I'll thank you to remove your damned spybeam from my planet."

"Your planet?"

"Precisely. Squatter's rights—and since there's no longer a contract between us, you're forbidden by galactic law to spy on me!"

Smathers looked dazed. "You're a fast talker, Wingert. But we'll fight this. Wait till I refer this upstairs. You won't get out of this so easily!"

Wingert flashed a cocky grin. "Refer it upstairs, if you want. I've got the law on my side."

Smathers snarled and broke the contact.

"Nicely argued," said XL-ad41 approvingly. "I hope you win your case."

"I have to," Wingert said. "They can't touch me, not if their contract is really binding on both parties. If they try to use their spybeam record as evidence against me, it'll show you threatening me. They don't have a leg to stand on."

"But how about me? I—"

"I haven't forgotten. There is a Molecular Disruptor in your belly waiting to disrupt me." Wingert grinned at the robot. "Look here, XL-ad41, face facts: you're a lousy salesman. You have a certain degree of misused guile, but you lack tact, subtlety. You can't go selling people things at gunpoint very long without involving your manufacturers in an interstellar war. As soon as you get back to Densobol and they find out what you've done, they'll dismantle you quicker than you can sell a Dreeg-Skinner.

"I was thinking that myself," the robot admitted.

"Good. But I'll make a suggestion: I'll *teach* you how to be a salesman. I used to be one, myself; besides, I'm an Earthman, and innately shrewd. When I'm through with you you move on to the next planet—I think your makers will forgive you if you make an extra stop—and sell out all your stock."

"It sounds wonderful," XL-ad41 said.

"One string is attached. In return for the education I'll give you, you're to supply me with such things as I need to live comfortably here on a permanent basis. Cigars, magneboots, short-range transmitters, depilator, etc. I'm sure your manufacturers will think it's a fair exchange, my profitmaking shrewdness for your magneboots. Oh, and I'll need one of those force-field generators too—just in case the Company shows up and tries to make trouble."

The robot glowed happily. "I'm sure such an exchange can be arranged. I believe this now makes us partners."

"It does indeed," Wingert said. "As your first lesson, let me show you an ancient Terran custom that a good salesman ought to know." He gripped the robot's cold metal hand firmly in his own. "Shake, partner!"

Robert Silverberg

*Temporarily grounded on an Eden-type planet, what inducement, if any, could be offered to a spaceship's crew to return to Earth—and another war.*

# THE SHIP OF HEAVEN

by MIKE DAVIES

---

The Ship of Heaven had sailed with the morning stars. That was two hundred years ago, said the savages.

On a green world a million miles from Earth the crew of the *Ariel* listened. Leaping from the ship at dawn, they had walked by a crystal sea, climbing a hill of flowers, moved — guns ready, instruments probing — through a forest of golden shadows and blue whispering silences. In the village of the savage colony they had marked the height of the men and the beauty of the women.

Now they listened, the sun a benediction on hands and faces relaxed with new food and drink and the freshness of the salt wind from the sea. It was a tale shaped by long-dead story-tellers, lit with the memories of an infant creed.

The chief savage raised his fish-spear. Behold! The Ship of Heaven left an Earth where the smoke of the wicked went up for ever and ever. She had borne with her their forefathers, as a mother bears children in her womb. And for a long time they had sailed down and far out among the sky-serpents and the camp-fires of the gods and the great Dark that had no name.

At the edge of the throng of villagers Captain Adams frowned. Had John Symes really failed to notice him?

Quietly, in deference to the chief, he moved round opposite his First Officer.

The chief droned on: They had come to the Good Place, the Quiet Place, this world they named New Heaven. And here in the sea they had drowned the evil weapons brought with them, and the Ship of Heaven they had burnt with thunder in a tower of flame . . .

Suddenly Symes caught the captain's eye. He got up reluctantly and pushed his way forward. The captain walked apart from the crowd and waited.

"Come back to the ship. I want to talk to you."

Together they went down the shorepath of painted boats and wooden huts and flowered sea-gardens, past children glossy with sun, a girl singing from a little bower. Symes glanced at the captain.

"What were the odds, sir, against getting forced down in a place like this?"

Adams grunted, his eyes fixed on the golden spire of the *Ariel*. "Are all the reports in?"

"Yes, sir: No fierce beasts, no dangerous germs. Mean annual temperature estimated at seventy-three Farenheit. Slight seasonal variation only . . ."

Crossing the shrubbed land before the forest, they reached an awning set up next to the ship. The captain entered, throwing his cap on the table. "Sit down, John. Why aren't Grant's men fixing the engines?"

"Hell, captain, I thought they needed a rest."

"They'll get that when the job's done and we're on the way out. We both know we've orders to make for Base—and fast! What about the sub-radio?"

"We can still receive signals but—"

"We can't send. We both know that, too."

Symes shifted his gaze. His thin young face was sullen. "Surely," he muttered inconsequently, "after all we've been through—and on a planet like this . . ." He swept his hand at the blue sky, the flashing sea, and the wide and gracious summer-land about them.

"I know," said Adams quietly.

He looked at Symes—feeling his own weariness come back to him, feeling also the weariness of his crew—remembering the months of skirmishes, the endless patrols, the smouldering peace between the Colonies and Earth.

He lit a cigarette and pushed the pack across the table. "We'd have to leave this planet fast even if there weren't signals from Base screaming at us to get on course. You can see the difficulties for yourself—you and me and Grant and twenty-five crewmen grounded in a place like this." He watched the frown of disagreement on the other's face.

"I don't see, captain, that a couple of days shore leave—"

"No. Hold on a minute. First, we've had eight solid months in space — right? Second, there's a full-scale war blowing up any hour and we're going to be in it. Third, we get forced down on a planet the loveliest this side of heaven where the one aim of the natives is to choke us with hospitality. And fourth, we can't signal Base. All that, I reckon, adds up to trouble."

"Damn it, captain, Earth won't lose the war over one ship! Wasn't there a war six years ago—and eight years before that? I say give the men their heads for a few days. Let 'em get some of the stardust out of their systems. They'll come back to the job refreshed. No one knows we're here anyway—and it may well take time to get the engine . . ."

"We'll re-check that with Grant. Something's very wrong if things can't be fixed in a few hours . . ." Adams broke off suddenly and stood up. "Yes? Who is it?" But even as he said the words they both saw it was a woman.

From the shadow of a bush ten paces distant she rose to her feet in one perfect movement, sun and shade gliding down over breasts and limbs. She stood motionless, staring towards them.

"She won't come any closer, sir. They're afraid of the ship."

"That's understandable." Adams walked forward with Symes following.

The girl looked at him in curiosity, then turned her eyes to the younger man. A smile of recognition blended with the sunlight. Adams, glancing at Symes, saw a flush mount his neck and face.

"When did you meet?"

"When we first landed this morning." Symes manner was a little too careless. "I questioned the chief at his hut. This is Tarma, his daughter."

"You seem to have made an impression." Instantly he regretted the remark, seeing the flicker of irritation in the other's eyes. The girl looked at him again.

"Captain . . ."

"Yes?"

Her voice was clear but hesitant, as though she remembered words long in disuse, had rehearsed them without complete success.

"My father has sent me to ask you to—the big feast—that we shall make—tonight. You and all the men from the—the Ship of Heaven."

"The what? Oh yes, I see. Well—"

"You will come?"

"I'm sorry, give my thanks to your father, but we expect to be gone by dawn. My men will have duties . . ." Symes, he noted, was staring at the girl as if she were a miracle. "Quite impossible, I'm afraid," he said firmly.

"Oh."

He watched the smile die. He felt he had been cruel to some delightful child.

"Look, sir," said Symes. "Surely there's no harm. What difference does it make?" He had edged closer to the girl. They both stared at him in appeal and accusation.

"I've already said its impossible." He heard the obstinacy in his own voice. "You know the reasons, John."

The girl turned again to Symes. The smile came back. She reached out and gently touched his shoulder with her fingertips. Still smiling, she moved slowly away.

"I'll walk with you," called Symes. He looked at Adams. "If, of course, I may have a few minutes shore leave?" His tone was bitter.

Adams hesitated. "Get Grant's team back to work first."

"Are you giving the crew permission to sleep ashore?"

"No. See everyone's aboard by sundown. We still don't know the locals well enough to trust them and we shan't be here long enough to find out." He ignored the anger in Symes' face. "Isn't it your watch at midnight?"

"Yes, sir, since you consider night-watches necessary in a place like this." Symes saluted impatiently and turned away, striding to overtake the girl.

Uneasily, Captain Adams stared after him. Close to grounding himself, he had been glad to see a youngster come up so fast in the Service, to see promise of the success that he, a veteran captain of an obsolescent warcraft, had not achieved. He had helped Symes all he could, given him a free hand with the crew, treated him more like a son than a second-in-command.

He turned back to the ship. Perhaps that had been the trouble. If anything was wrong now—did go wrong—the fault would be his alone.

And this, he thought bitterly, would be the devil's own time and place to put things right.

He stepped on to the ramp and was carried soundlessly to the main port, his scowl jolting the sentry to attention. Inside, the command shuttle lifted him past the cold surfaces and the unwinking lights.

In the engine-room he found Grant.

The chief technician was sitting before an inspection screen, but he wasn't looking at it. His face was propped in his hand and turned dreamily towards the open port. His hair was wet from recent swimming.

"Well?" said Adams behind him.

Grant jumped up and swung round.

"Captain!" He swallowed. "I was making an inspection, sir, of the auxiliary feed—"

"Suppose you just tell me what's wrong with the bloody engines."

"It's the auxiliary feed, sir, as I said . . ." Defensively, he let fly a barrage of technicalities. "Have to strip the whole thing down."

"When?"

"Directly my team shows up."

"That should be any minute. How long's it going to take?"

"Difficult to say—at the moment, sir."

There was an expression like fear in his eyes, instantly gone. Adams stared at him thoughtfully.

"Something bothering you, Grant?"

"No, sir. Nothing at all."

Too glib, or was he imagining things?

"Let me know if you want extra help. I don't have to tell you how important it is."

Grant stood there, his face expressionless.

"Have we heard, captain?"

"War? Not yet. Soon now, I think." He raised his head, hearing the voices and footsteps. "Here's your team back. Get on with it."

"Yes, sir."

Adams re-entered the shuttle and sped to the bridge. Blount, the senior crewman, lounged on the rail, his cap shoved back on his dark head. He had switched on the viewer, watching the slow drift of sea and sky, of green forests and blue hills. He straightened his cap and saluted absently. Adams looked at him.

"Any signals?"

"Two, sir; the usual gripes. I put them on your desk."

"Bring them here." There was a quiet edge in the captain's voice.

Resentment showed in the other's face. He went out and came back with the signals. Adams glanced at them. *Report your position. Return Base immediately.* They were indeed the usual gripes. He tossed them back at Blount. "Bring me all signals directly they arrive."

"Very good, sir." Blount's tone was sulky.

Ignoring the shuttle, Adams walked down through the shining corridors. Inside his cabin, he closed the door and leant back against it. What in hell's name was wrong with everyone?

But he already knew the answer to that. They didn't want to leave—any of them.

And who could blame them? He sighed, then straightened as he saw the two distant figures through the port. He touched the viewer.

It was John Symes and the woman—what was her name? Tarma.

They came laughing out of the sea together. In the shallows they embraced. Arm in arm, they walked off down the shore towards the village. Further along the coast he could see half a dozen crewmen splashing in the water. There seemed to be a good number of the village women with them.

For a second he hesitated, then relaxed again. What matter, after all? The locals were surely harmless. Bottling the crew up in the ship would do no good. They'd be back at sundown anyway. Let them, as Symes had said, get some of the stardust out of their systems. And in the tough times ahead at least they'd have something good to look back on.

He crushed a thought of Grant and the quick fear in his eyes. A natural anxiety over war? That, by God, would be cause enough.

He looked from the open port. The wind was petalled with flowers, sharp with brine, rich with a smell like gardens after rain. Suddenly it occurred to him that he, alone of all of them, had not yet swum in that crystal sea.

With an odd feeling of guilt he reached for trunks and towel.

He walked down through the warm shore-wind, over the unblemished sand. He stripped at the edge of the sea.

Wading, he felt the cool pressure of the water climb his body. Plunging, he entered a clear quiet world that bore him back up in a silver swarm of bubbles. He gasped with pleasure, floating with his face turned to the sky. Beyond that sun, other suns, and beyond those, down some long highway of the stars and in some unimaginable time and place, was Earth. Floating there, with arms and legs spread to the lifting sea, it was impossible to believe. All at once he felt his disbelief so strongly he turned his head to where the *Ariel* stood straight and menacing against the sky.

He looked away again. No, this was unreal, he knew, this garden planet—so clean and sweet and in such sharp contrast to the sick atomic deserts of the Earth. But it was Earth that was real—Earth and the ship and the rising holocaust that would reach out God knew how far among the stars. Suddenly the water chilled, the sky darkened. Behind the pink mornings and the blue cool nights, war, like a witchdoctor, rattled his bones.

Slowly, he swam back to the shore.

Stooping to pick up his towel, he checked his hand.

The gun had gone from his holster.

He looked round quickly.

Through the bushes by the forest-edge a shadow moved, a figure running low and very fast.

The figure of a woman.

Walking through the fading light, he got back to the *Ariel*. He closed his cabin door behind him and fingered the empty holster at his belt.

Now he must send for the chief, search the village perhaps.

But there was something he had to know first.

He pitched his cap on the bunk and stood staring at it a moment, then he opened the door and walked out.

At Symes' cabin he knocked and entered.

Symes was seated at the table. An open book, a leather bottle and a quarter-filled glass stood before him. He started up.

"Take it easy, John." Adams pulled a chair forward and sank into it, his arms resting on the back. "Just wanted a chat."

Symes stared at him, then reached for an empty glass. His tone was respectful, even cordial.

"Have a drink, sir?"

"What is it?"

"Local stuff. Grain spirit filtered through charcoal. Pure as hell-fire. Try some?"

"Thanks." Adams swallowed, feeling the liquid glow pleasantly in his mouth and throat. He set down the glass and picked up the open book "Tennyson, eh? Since when have you been interested in ancient poetry?"

Symes didn't answer.

Adams scanned the page. He quoted slowly:

*"There the passions cramp'd no longer  
shall have scope and breathing space;  
I will take some savage woman,  
she shall rear my dusky race."*

Symes leant forward, knocking over his glass. A thin stream of liquid ran unheeded. Suddenly his guard was down. He spoke quickly, urgently.

"These people, captain, with their way of life—they've got something we'll never have—never!"

"You think so?" Adams regarded him steadily. "Destroying their equipment, the ship, thousands of years of technical achievement? Going down to barbarism in two hundred years? There were a lot of escapists after the third Atomic War—"

"No! Listen to me! We took the wrong course somewhere—a course for self-destruction. These people got a fresh start in a new world. No moral or technical hangovers. They won't go wrong. They'll take their time. Civilisation's like a good brandy—like this spirit here, maybe—takes a long time to mature."

"Sure it does, if you've got the right ingredients to start with, the right qualities. I don't think these people have. They're going back, not forward." Adams paused, then said deliberately. "It's the woman you want though, isn't it? You're in love with her—"

"Captain!" Symes was on his feet.

"Just answer the question, John."

For an instant Symes stood still. He picked up the empty glass slowly and made as if to right it, then with one impatient movement knocked it from the table.

"Yes," he said. "Yes—I am! But it's not just that." He leant closer, his words tumbling crazily.

"Look, captain, why don't we just pull out—out of space and the Service and God knows what's to come? We're all single men—*have* to be for this job. This planet is paradise, you've got to admit it! Remember the reports? No fierce beasts, no dangerous germs, no ugliness or disease. Why, we could travel the whole lousy universe until we died and we'd never find a place like this again. And no-one knows where we are! No-one would ever find us! We could—chuck our weapons in the sea, like *they* did—blow up the ship, there's not a man who wouldn't be glad to settle . . ."

There was a knock. Symes looked round wildly. He passed a hand over his face, took a breath. Adams did not turn his head.

"Come in."

Blount entered and saluted. "From Base, sir." His face was wooden. Adams took the signal and nodded. He waited for the door to close. He read briefly and looked up.

"War's declared. That's part of your answer. We won't bother with the rest."

Symes stood quiet, not looking at him. He said flatly, almost without interest. "All the more reason why we should stay."

"John." Adams got up. "Assemble the crew—now. I've given you a free hand with this ship—I'll give you one last bit of a captain's prerogative. You're going to read out the declaration of war notified in this signal. You're also going to read the Emergency Regulations. And when you're through stand the crew by. I want to say a few things myself." He paused. "Do that, and co-operate fully in getting the ship off this planet, and I won't ask you any question."

For a moment they stared at each other. Symes' eyes were suddenly wary. "What sort of questions, captain?"

Adams said, quietly, "First, why Tarma stole my gun—it was Tarma, wasn't it? Second, why Grant is afraid."

Symes took up the signal. His voice and movements were dangerously calm. "Is that all you have to say to me, sir?"

"Not quite. When you read the Emergency Regulations, you can emphasise the section which gives a commander summary powers of execution in the event of mutiny or desertion."

He nodded, almost kindly.

"I'm giving you a chance, son. Don't throw it away on a Christmas-tree planet and a fairy doll."

In the depths of the ship Adams thumbed the armoury release button. The door stayed shut. He produced a ray-key and set it to the lock. No response. He nodded grimly. Only an expert could have fixed that if the door was to be re-opened easily later on. He flashed the intercom for the engine-room. "Where's Mr. Grant?"

"Just left the ship, sir. Mr. Symes sent him."

Symes' voice, assembling the crew, came crisply from a score of speakers throughout the ship: "Attention all hands . . ." Adams cursed softly. Seconds later he was at the main port. The sentry straightened. At Adams' question he pointed seaward. The captain stepped through the airlock.

The ramp swung him down through blue starlight to pale sand, but he had already glimpsed the figure of Grant moving towards the shore.

Walking and running through the scattered bushes, Adams shortened the intervening distance to about forty paces. "Grant!" he shouted. The wind blew the word over his shoulder.

Then, suddenly, there was not one shape but two ahead of him. The newcomer moved swiftly and with a deadly grace. Adams saw the soft light along the wooden spear and ran faster—"Grant! Grant!"—but even as he came up the hunter had struck the hunted down and struck again.

Before Adams seized her and tried to twist the spear from her hands he knew it was Tarma.

"You murderous bitch!"

She struggled, spitting and snarling, but there was triumph in her eyes.

"Now—Ship of Heaven stay—"

Suddenly with animal strength she pushed the spearhead forward against his grip, driving the point into his thigh. With a quick twist she freed herself and was gone, a shadow over the sand.

He cursed, feeling the damp patch spread under his fingers. He looked down at Grant.

He was sitting leaning back on one hand. His head was tilted up and his eyes were wide with shock and pain. He had drawn his gun and now gripped it uselessly.

"Here, easy now." Gently, Adams got him out of his tunic and ripped the shirt. There were two jagged punctures below the right shoulder-blade. His back was smeared with blood.

"Captain . . ."

"You don't have to talk now. I'm getting you back to the ship." Quickly he ripped and folded the shirt into a pad.

"I—want to talk, captain. He—Symes told me to go slow—on the engines. He said you'd see reason—that we'd all stop here—no more wars—make a new life—"

"Come on—"

"Wait! I've—the engines—okay now."

"What?"

"Yes—I figured you wouldn't stay. Symes said we'd prepare the ship for—for demolition—"

"Did he, by God!" said Adams softly.

"Yes—like these people did. The Ship of Heaven. I—wouldn't agree. He said he'd get it done anyway . . ."

"Why did you leave the ship?"

"He sent me—tell Tarma—couldn't meet yet. Everyone—be at feast." Grant was breathing noisily, the rasp of pain in his words. "Maybe he found out. The engines . . ."

"No." Adams straightened slowly. "But he must have told Tarma you were something to do with getting the ship away. She grabbed her chance."

Grant retched suddenly. Blood spurted at lips and nostrils.

"Steady . . ."

Adams got him to his feet, pulling the limp arm across his shoulder, feeling the tremor of ice and fire in his own leg as, half-dragging, half-carrying, he took the first uncertain step towards the ship.

Grant sagged, choking, as they neared the *Ariel*. Adams lifted him across his shoulders. He had discarded cap and tunic, but the sweat blurred his vision and the ten remaining yards to the ramp was a wide desert of pain and frustration across which he crawled with his burden.

"Sentry!" he gasped the word. "Sentry!"

The silence was made of the night-wind and the sea-hush and the pumping of his blood. The whole world seemed to move with the beating of his heart. At the foot of the ramp he tripped, falling heavily, feeling exhausted relief in the upward rush as the mechanism activated. Gasping, he turned his head to Grant. The open eyes stared fixedly at the stars. The last dark bubbles were bursting in the mouth. Adam's fingers touched him wearily, automatically, needing no proof that he was dead.

The great port swung idly on its molecular bearings; the ship was silent. Adams got to his feet and jabbed the alarm bell, hoping for the running feet of the watch that he knew would not come. He leant with his head against the cold hull, waiting for breath and blood to subside. If only he had not given Symes that last chance. The thought hammered at him.

Useless to think of that.

He roused himself. Carefully, he dragged Grant's body through the airlock, gently straightened the tumbled limbs.

Through the ship he sped on the shuttle—engine-rooms, crew's quarters, war-room, bridge. The armoury door was wide, the arms were gone. A surface trolley was missing from the hold. The crew's quarters held the personal debris of sudden departure—torn paper, a shirt, a service cap, a book.

In the engine-room he flung the master-switch. The green lights blazed, the power-gauges jumped. He switched off thankfully. Grant had told the truth.

Methodically, he rechecked for evidence of sabotage. In the war-room he found it. The M-gun, standard weapon for destruction of spacemines, had been tampered with. The tiny M-tube that generated the detonating beam had been removed. That meant Symes had it with him, had probably beamed it on to the ship's armaments. The *Ariel* could be destroyed at will.

He checked the charge-reading of Grant's gun. Outside the ship he turned in the direction of the village, towards the flickering lights and a new rapid pulsing of drums. It seemed a long way to have to go and he tried to think of nothing except the fact that somehow he was going to get there.

A sapphire moon stood quiet among the stars but down in the village the night was tattered with cooking-fires and

torches. Crewmen and villagers sat eating and drinking in a wide half-circle before the hut of the chief.

Adams halted by a group of singers and drumbeaters. He looked across at Symes where he sat between Tarma and the chief, his thin face eddying in the firelight, the fixed smile in his eyes. The crewmen stiffened uneasily, the singing and drumming faltered into silence.

"Go on playing, blast you!" said Symes. A solitary drum started to beat. Wincing, Adams kicked it aside.

The chief had half-risen uncertainly but Symes was already on his feet. He swayed a little. The girl looked up at him proudly, made as if to support him with her hand. She had chosen her mate. She sat secure in her beauty, in her own wild and lovely world. She turned her eyes to Adams in cool hatred. There was no fear or guilt upon her face.

Symes pointed. "Captain Adams! I see you have Grant's gun. That is the only small-arm the *Ariel* possesses, including your own. Why? Because we stripped the armoury and ran the whole damn lot in the sea—drowned 'em, trolley and all!"

The captain did not answer, looking at each man in turn, noting each face that looked back defiantly, or with embarrassment, or that did not look at all.

"Don't try the personal touch," said Symes. "We've finished with orders now. We're on shore leave, captain—*indefinite* shore leave. We're tired of your big empty spaces and your miserable wars. We're going to settle down, take wives, have children, get some peace and happiness. We've got our chance and we're keeping it!"

The voices of the crew were hoarse in agreement. Symes stepped forward and stood before Adams—spokesman for them all. The villagers whispered together. In twos and threes they rose and moved away. The girl had risen quietly and stood close to Symes.

"Listen to me," said Adams. "This place has made you forget other things—important things." He looked at his men, fumbling for words, holding his anger in check. "That you should be here is in part my fault. As captain I'm responsible for the discipline of my crew. But one thing is now clear to all of us—that at this moment you are all guilty of mutiny and desertion."

No-one moved. He felt their eyes on the gun at his belt. There was a smile almost of pity on Symes' face. Adams went on doggedly.

"Over that I do not intend to hedge or bargain, except to tell you I take into full account the influences to which you have been subjected. Against those of you who voluntarily return to duty now, I will therefore take only nominal disciplinary action."

Symes laughed. "That's good, captain! That's real good! Nominal disciplinary action! You can't take action of any kind. One gun can't get twenty-six of us. You can't even shoot me, while I've got this—not unless you want your precious ship blown to hell!" He held the M-tube high above his head, smiling. "Listen!"

Adams heard the high mosquito hum that told him the target was assured, that the detonating beam could strike at the pressure of a fingertip.

Symes laughed again. He flipped the tube in his palm, pointed with it to the village huts, the shadowy villagers. "Their ancestors blew up their ship. The Ship of Heaven, they called it. And they were right. Here they got their Heaven—back there they had hell. These people call the *Ariel* the Ship of Heaven. Right again! We found our bit of heaven here. Back there we had hell—back there *and* in space—like we'll get again, and far worse, if you have your way. But you're not going to get it, Captain Adams! You're just not going to get it! Is he, men?"

"No!" It was a growl now.

"You see, captain? You've got to go. We don't want trouble-makers in paradise. And we can pass up our little firework display with the *Ariel*. The engines are okay, thanks to Grant. The two of you should manage to get back. It comes to this, then: Go now—at once—or we blow up the ship! What's it going to be?"

In the silence and the firelight the captain looked at his men. A voice in his brain whispered: *shoot Symes now and take a chance*. He suppressed it. That was not the way.

He said heavily, "I'll go. Give me the M-tube."

"The gun first, please, captain."

Adams drew it out and pitched it in the air. It fell between himself and Symes.

"The captain is a man of his word!" said Symes. He looked round suddenly. "Here, Blount. Give him this!"

Blount hesitated, then took the silvery tube carefully and brought it to Adams. He did not meet his eyes. Adams held it in his palm. It glittered, humming softly to itself. He

pressed the safety button. The humming ceased. He looked up slowly.

"All right, I'll go," he said again. Suddenly the anger and frustration boiled up in him. Ignoring Symes, he addressed the crew direct. He raised his voice.

"Stop here then, all of you! I'll take the ship up myself! You stop here and rot! Stop here and enjoy your private paradise away from your duties and your fear of getting hurt—though you won't escape that!"

He stared round at them, feeling the blood in his face.

"No, you'll die here in your own little cocoons, secure enough! But before you die you'll see your fine children, grandchildren too. You'll be able to talk to them—about Earth, maybe, and how you ratted on her. You'll be able to watch them, so beautiful and so dumb, going the way of all creatures who have life too easy for them and too soft . . ."

He took a pace closer.

"And don't think you'll get rescued one day if you don't like it after all. Don't think that when you judge the war over and there's no death penalty to worry about you can crawl out of your huts and burn down the forests for a beacon, or cut mile-long SOS's in the sand."

He drew a breath. He could see the indecision in their faces.

"We are in unchartered space, light years off course. I'm the only one who will know the co-ordinates of this planet. And I'm going to forget them! I'm going to forget you, too. But there's one thing you can do for me first, before I leave."

He moved closer still, clenching his fists.

"Back there in the ship you'll find the body of Grant. I'm going to bury him on this planet. Since I'm no longer giving orders, I ask that you help dig his grave. Something else, maybe, for you to tell your children—and show them! He was murdered by one of your new friends."

He had touched them now. He saw their indecision change slowly into anger. He waited, standing still. For the first time, a terrible uncertainty flickered in Symes' face.

He watched them exchange glances, stare from himself to Symes and back again.

"Why captain . . ." Blount had moved forward. He passed a hand over his eyes, as if coming awake. "We only wanted

a little shore leave . . ." His voice trailed off. Then he straightened. He said, steadily, "You're still giving the orders, sir."

"Very well. Mr. Symes will remain here, the rest of you get back to the ship."

"Yes, sir." Blount checked a moment. "Captain—who was it—?"

"Get back to the ship."

"Come on there!" Blount shouted over his shoulder. "You heard what the captain said!"

The crew moved off in straggling groups. Most of them looked back. They kept moving.

The villagers had disappeared except for the girl. Adams faced Symes.

"Pick up the gun."

"Captain," said Symes. "Captain—you swear it's true about Grant?"

"Ask her?"

The woman flung herself forward. She gripped Symes by the shoulders. "For you!" she screamed out. "For you!"

Symes pushed her roughly aside. She fell, sobbing. He picked up the gun.

Adams held out his hand.

"Give it here, John," he said quietly.

But Symes was looking at the girl, strangely, almost with curiosity. Adams saw his lips move, knew suddenly the hopeless jingle in his mind:

*I will take some savage woman . . .*

"You spoilt everything," Symes whispered to her. "God damn you, you spoilt everything . . ."

Terror leapt in her eyes, but before she could move he had fired. Her body jerked and was still. From somewhere in the village, thinly, insistently, voices began to scream.

Calmly, Symes handed over the gun. His hands were steady.

"You know, captain," he stated, almost conversationally. "I'm not going back."

"John!" Adams stumbled, grabbing at Symes' arm as he stepped back. "You're sick. This place has made you—ill! Come back to the ship. You'll be dealt with fairly."

Symes shook his head. His face was quiet, half-smiling. He backed away. Adams limped after him.

"Don't be a bloody fool! It's not too late—even now!  
God almighty—"

"So long, captain."

Symes turned in the opposite direction to the ship, walking away easily, quietly, under a sky filled with bright stars and a sapphire moon.

"Take him!!" Adams shouted it to the absent crew, the skulking villagers, to anyone in the world who might hear and act. "Stop him!"

But there was no-one but himself.

There was no-one but himself and a gun both symbol and agent of the thing that he must do. From the limits of consciousness the world narrowed sharply to the beamed sights and the moving form.

*"For Christ's sake, son . . ."*

He whispered it, hearing his own words even as he pressed the trigger, seeing the tiny figure drop with jumbled limbs.

And knowing that in all time and space there was nothing so inevitably dead as a dead human body.

"Sub-radio repaired, sir."

"Signal base . . ."

The great ship rose like a phoenix from the ashes of the night. The land and water mingled far below.

Then, as speed and distance multiplied, there was only a world like countless others, arced with the dawnlight of an ordinary sun.

"Acceleration stations!"

"Acceleration stations, sir!"

A trillion miles led to a warring Earth.

War was a debt, thought Adams, that must be paid. Far back, in the boyhood of the race, the fault lay uncorrected in heart and mind. And now—man would not be man if he fled the evil of his own time, and of his heritage.

Down there, he knew, a handful of savages knelt, not in sorrow for the dead or in wonder and pity of the living, but in superstitious fear of the ship.

He punched for overdrive, turning his face from the crew, seeing the sun blaze its last and the green world blink and vanish.

The Ship of Heaven had sailed with the morning stars.

**Article**

*Kenneth Johns gives an interesting resume of the size of space vehicles to come during the next few years and sums up the prospects of the various types and their performances*

# BIGGER BIRDS

by KENNETH JOHNS

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Enormous power is needed to put a recoverable man into space. No doubt a few fanatics might volunteer to be a non-recoverable spaceman; but for all practical purposes space research scientists must think and design in terms of bringing back any man who ventures out into space. That quite a number won't be coming back doesn't affect the issue.

To obtain this enormous power at the present time, with chemical rockets, there is no alternative to increasing the thrust and hence the size of the boosters. 2,250 ton rockets are within sight and larger models may well be in the planning stages.

The trouble is that human beings can't be miniaturised; space-trained dwarfs might become fashionable but the supply seems limited. But men must be put into space. It's a matter of prestige now, with both the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. pledged to space exploration by manned ships.

The first generation of outward bound American rockets are practically obsolete and the more powerful second generation types are only a stage towards third and fourth generation ships. The Russians, with their two year lead—and make no

mistake, it is at least a two year lead when man-carrying rockets are considered—are already well towards their objective.

One big step forward in every sense has been achieved. Whereas the first generation rockets were merely converted weapons, the new ships of space are designed wholly for space research; in fact, they are far too big for use as Earth-to-Earth missiles. Their immense size is consequent on the sheer brute power needed to put up tons of mass, to launch the requirements of ships capable of travelling the interplanetary tracks to deliver their cargoes, living or automated, safely into orbit or on to planet. No doubt the size of these colossi will evoke surprise in the future when set against performance; but until we can use a different system from chemical mass-reaction rockets—we're stuck with building them bigger and bigger.

Increase in payload can be obtained by employing more efficient fuels, by chopping off dead mass from ship structures and controls and by the use of better design and new, stronger and lighter materials of construction. But the hundredfold increase in payload essential for the future can only be obtained by making giants of tomorrow's birds.

No matter what ion propulsion, nuclear rocket drives or plasma power is available in the near future, it looks from this date as if the punch of classical chemical fuels is indispensable to put them above the atmosphere before they can operate safely.

Liquid oxygen plus paraffin is, and will be used, for many rockets, but it lacks the power of the more expensive LOX plus Hydyne which is itself less powerful than the dangerous LOX and hydrogen systems on which many of the motors will operate. Already in the testing stage is the vicious liquid fluorine plus hydrogen system.

Liquid fluorine is a most unhealthy fluid. Available in tankers in the U.S.A. in spite of its corrosive and poisonous characteristics, it combines with hydrogen to form hydrogen fluoride, notable for its ability to attack glass and rock and for the slowness with which burns made by it in living tissue heal. Nasty stuff. Trouble has already been met in finding materials to withstand the HF flame from a fluorite burning engine. Graphite stands up well to HF but is rapidly attacked by fluorine vapour. Deflector plates of graphite or silicon

carbide have to be used on rocket testing stands since water curtains cannot be employed owing to the possibility of contaminating vast quantities of water with poisonous, soluble fluorine compounds.

A chance observation has already led to a new construction material which bids fair to oust conventional metals from the bodies of tomorrow's ships. Tiny metal whiskers growing from electrical apparatus were shorting relays and when examined—exasperatedly, we imagine—were found to be pure, single crystals of metal of a strength near the theoretical value for the metal. A deal of work had to be done before the trick of using them was found; now, bonded together with plastics or ceramics, they are enormously stronger weight for weight than the solid metal. One pound of whisker laminate may have the strength of and be able to replace 5 to 10 pounds of ordinary metal. There seem to be no practical snags in the large scale production of such whiskers, except that the price tag runs out at 10 to 20 times normal; a small premium to pay when the cost of putting mass into space is in itself so outrageous.

However, the Russians are not waiting for sophisticated materials.  $6\frac{1}{2}$  tons hurled into orbit in February, 1961, is sufficient for a man to orbit Earth, carrying out valuable observations for days before he successfully retrieves himself and his photos and records. The Mercury capsule used by the Americans for their first astronaut weighed one ton.

Spacecraft 2, the satellite that carried Belka and Strelka and was launched in August, 1960, weighed a mere  $4\frac{1}{2}$  tons and was successfully recovered with its crew of space dogs still alive. Spacecraft 2 was launched by a first stage with a probable thrust of 800,000 pounds—compare this with the 360,000 pound thrust of Atlas, the U.S.A.'s main, first stage, present day, research booster.

But the Americans are banking on Saturn to be ready by 1965, its eight motors in the first stage giving a total thrust of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  million pounds. Because of its relatively unsophisticated design, the first stage engine has already been built and undergone static tests. The second stage will be a modified Titan missile whilst the third stage will be powered by hydrogen plus oxygen and the fourth will be solid fuelled. Saturn will be able to put 9 tons into a 300 mile orbit;  $1\frac{1}{2}$  tons into a 22,000 mile orbit; or soft land  $\frac{1}{2}$  ton on the moon.

9 tons in space is fantastic by the standards of three years ago. It is sufficient to put up a self-contained 3-man space station for several months and then allow the crew to return via a Mercury-type capsule. Cutting the mass of such a station to 7 tons would enable Saturn to orbit around the Moon and back.

Saturn will be a giant; but it may well by then be dwarfed by the Russian's hinted-at rocket capable of putting 60 tons into a 300 mile orbit, possibly available by 1963 or 64.

Before these are operational, we'll see Vega and Centaur doing the donkey work of Western space exploration. Either should be able to put  $3\frac{1}{2}$  tons into the 300 mile orbit,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a ton into a 22,000 mile orbit or  $\frac{1}{2}$  of a ton soft-landed on the Moon. Centaur should be test-fired this year, and even with the smashing power of Saturn to come, it seems that Centaur and Vega will be around for some time.

They both use Atlas first stages and solid fuelled third stages. The difference between the two lies in the second stages. Vega uses LOX plus paraffin; Centaur uses LOX plus liquid hydrogen.

Centaur is the vehicle picked for project Surveyor, when, in 1963 to 1966, seven attempts to soft land  $\frac{1}{2}$  ton automatic lunar surveying stations on the Moon will be made.

Even before then, there will be five Ranger shots, planned to use the Atlas-Agena B rocket combination for space exploration. At least one of these shots in 1961 will try to rough-land a  $\frac{1}{2}$  ton Tonto instrument package on the lunar surface to telemeter back information from the rugged instruments, particularly a seismometer for measuring seleno-quakes.

The Russians will probably be more ambitious. In their first attempts to rough or soft-land on the Moon, instead of  $\frac{1}{2}$  ton they already have the capability of soft-landing  $\frac{1}{2}$  ton there, enough to carry a small automated caterpillar tracked vehicle to make traverses across the surface, beaming back TV pictures. Solar cells and batteries would supply power during the long lunar days. Radio power is not a limiting factor since the 5 watt transmitter aboard Pioneer V could be picked up over a distance of 22,463,000 miles on the 106th day of flight.

By 1968 or 1969 the Americans hope to have Nova blasting into space. Its 8 million pound thrust first stage with four

other stages will be able to haul 75 tons into the 300 mile orbit. The Russians have been hinting at a rocket to carry 60 ton payloads into space, perhaps available in 1964.

At countdown, Saturn will weigh 500 tons whilst Nova is expected to scale out at about 2,250 tons. Vanguard, you remember, weighed 10 tons at takeoff and its payload in March, 1958, was 3½ pounds.

Nova's capabilities suggest permanent space stations above Earth with crews spelling one another, refuelling stations and all the advanced research which can only be carried out above the atmosphere. It is, however, notable that there have been few comments on the ability of Nova to orbit fuel tanks to replenish the fuel of probes outward bound to the planets. In fact, in direct contrast, the Americans quote the fact that Nova will be able to put 19 tons into the 22,000 mile orbit or soft-land 9 tons on the Moon, a payload sufficient for manned exploration of the lunar surface and return to Earth—all with one rocket.

Maybe the prophecies of manned space stations acting as refuelling bases on the way out won't come to fruition—at least, not before the Moon has been reached. It could well be that problems of operating manned space stations and transferring fuel and supplies in space are greater through recent discoveries than the problem of putting all the eggs in one shot. Certainly, a problem that has to be cracked before space station replenishment is a practicality, the spacesuit problem, is a long way from being solved. It still needs three men to suit up one, and then it takes 30 seconds for the astronaut to move a hand from his knee and touch the top of his helmet.

Even so, the answer is almost certainly that with the power plants coming along, both American and Russian space scientists have decided to make a bald-headed dash for a manned landing on the Moon. In the fierce, international, cut-throat competition there just isn't time to go through the space station phase.

Even with the necessary emphasis on chemical rockets of greater and greater power, other systems are not entirely excluded from current research. Electrical space propulsion systems, ion drives giving tiny thrusts for long periods for interplanetary missions, will be available for space testing in

1962 and it is expected that the nuclear rocket motors will be ready for flight testing in 1965.

Emphasis by the Americans on that 22,000 mile orbit—which allows a satellite to stay over one part of the Earth—points up their interest in the utility side of space research-communications. Courier 1B, put up in October, 1960, was a small test satellite of 500 pounds containing 300 pounds of equipment to demonstrate the feasibility of commercial space radio. The estimated income from 8 communication satellites would be £500 million in 20 years. But it will require the giant vehicles of the near future to put up and service such devices.

While NASA has 260 space experiments planned for the next 10 years, it seems fairly certain that Great Britain has lagged too far behind to catch up. To catch up—alone. Even if the old faithful, much-talked-about but never off the drawing board, combination of Black Knight and Blue Streak were operated, it could lift only one ton into the 300 mile orbit. This seems to be too little too late.

Hawker Siddeley are talking of co-operating with a French Government group on three schemes with Blue Streak as the first stage and French rockets as the others. Envisaged is a communications network, which might cost the same as an Earth-girdling cable. The second scheme is for a satellite to be used in navigation and the third for a satellite-destroying missile. We trust that this news will not make the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. grumble about other people seeking to knock down what they put up.

One fact that has been clear for a long time to those genuinely interested in space research now, belatedly, seems to be coming home to roost in the brains of those responsible for planning in Britain. The record of the aviation industry since the end of the Second World War has been rather poor, to phrase it mildly, so perhaps with the challenge of space to wake them up they might at last turn out trumps. At last recognition seems to be accorded the idea that for a nation or group of nations to get into space is a mark of forward-thinking, modern civilisation and, dare we mention it, of commercial good sense. Already four-jet airliners seem to be ninety per cent American; maybe satellite vehicles and communications and research satellites within the next decade might take off under the aegis of a pan-European organisation.

For time is running out fast. Maybe Great Britain is already too far behind and has lost the race. Sputnik I went up on 4th October, 1957. Explorer I on 31st January, 1958. Sputnik I weighed 184 lb. and Explorer I 30.8 lb.

Nova can put up 75 tons into the 300 mile orbit. The time gap is three to four years, to today, so that Nova will be jetting off ten years after the beginning of the space age. Most of us will be around in 20 years time and at the present rate of increase in the intensity of space exploration, life is going to offer a great deal more of interest. But what markings are those rockets of tomorrow going to carry out into space?

*Kenneth Johns*

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Not only experimental animals but human beings are disappearing from the effects of the "happy dreams" drug. Greville, of UN Narcotics, still cannot find how the powder is distributed.

# PUT DOWN THIS EARTH

by JOHN BRUNNER

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## Conclusion

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## Foreword

*With the rapidly increased birthrate after World War Two, governmental administrations break down and the United Nations is called in to form a world government. Specialised departments are set up to handle Food and Agriculture, Health, Fuel and Power, Conservation, Pure Research, but they fight a losing battle, and resentment grows internationally for the lack of luxuries and even necessities.*

*As overpopulation reaches a critical point the UN Narcotics Division discovers that a new drug craze is sweeping teenage America—a powder called "happy dreams"; injected in the thigh it gives the user glimpses of a fantasy world. The addiction seems to last about a year, after which the victim disappears.*

*Nicholas Greville, a UN narcotics agent, is taking a sample of "happy dreams" from New York to laboratories in Colorado,*

*when his car breaks down in Kansas and he is stranded in a small town called Isolation. Greville is horrified to find that the drug craze has hit this remote area and informs Dr. Barriman in Sandy Gulch by visiphone. Barriman sends a helicopter to pick up Greville and leaves a field team in Isolation to investigate the drug situation.*

*At the laboratories Greville meets Dr. Kathy Pascoe of World Health who is using "happy dreams" on monkeys and apes. One ape named Tootsie is in the final stages of the drug and is closely guarded. During the night the cage is found empty despite electronic alarms.*

*Anxious to get back to New York in time for his wedding anniversary, Greville telephones his wife Leda. They quarrel and she threatens to join the "happy dreamers".*

*Eventually arriving in New York Greville finds that his wife is out and falls asleep worrying about her threat. Hours later he awakes to find her home—and a "happy dreamer". She tells him that while he slept she gave him an injection also—one shot is sufficient to start him on the road to addiction.*

*Greville volunteers to become a guinea-pig so that Narcotics can observe his reactions to the drug. For three nights he has strange dreams of another world in which there is a new colour called "varm". Slowly the dream fades and while on light duties Greville goes to interview Dr. Franz Wald who had been transferred from the UN laboratories after the disappearance of Tootsie. Wald explains his theories on the drug craze in an obscure manner and while Greville feels that the answers are within his grasp he cannot see them clearly. Meanwhile, the disappearance rate of "happy dreamers" jumps to alarming proportions.*

### sixteen

His interview with Wald left Greville with a peculiar disjointed sensation—as though he was sorting through the bits of some maddening puzzle, the kind with which it is claimed you can make a square, or a circle, out of what seem to be random fragments.

"Go see Kathy Pascoe," Wald had suggested. Greville turned the idea around in his head. There were other leads he felt he might follow, but—all right, it was logical that the people on the spot, at the Institute, should pick up the loose ends Wald had left dangling.

Accordingly he went to the Transport Rationalisation office and got himself an uncomfortable ride in a freight 'copter as far as Pueblo. It was dark before he arrived. From Pueblo a truck carrying crates for the Pure Research section of the Institute took him the rest of the way.

The first member of the staff that he saw on his arrival was the duty watchman who checked his ID cards and permitted him to enter the grounds. The second was Joe Martinez.

It was obvious as soon as the truck halted outside the main watch-house near the gate that something was wrong. From the watch-house there came the sound of voices raised in heated argument; through the windows, even before he got down from the cab of the truck, Greville had caught sight of shadows cast by a photographic floodlight that made the ordinary illumination of the interior seem dark.

The truck's turbine hummed and it moved on through the gate, raising dust with its wide soft tyres. Greville, before walking after it, hesitated. He was on the point of asking the watchman what was wrong, when the door of the watch-house flew open and Joe Martinez stamped out, turning his head to shout back over his shoulder.

"And I'm telling you you're talking through your—!"

He slammed the door and came down the steps, shaking all over. He walked past Greville without seeing him, his eyes fixed on vacancy.

"Martinez!" Greville called after him. The security man turned slowly, his face dark with fury. "What's going on?"

"What in hell are you doing here, Greville? I thought you were in LA today."

"I was." Greville didn't go into details. "What's going on?"

"God alone knows." Martinez's voice filled with disgusted anger. "The happy dreams dust has gone from the watch-house safe. We've checked every possible lead, and—oh, go and look if you want to. Barriman's practically accused me of selling it to an addict."

A car pulled up a few yards away. Someone got out of it. Greville glanced around automatically and recognised Dr. Desmond, the chief of the Institute. His famous and photogenic crest of white hair shone in the light from the watch-house windows.

"Martinez!" Desmond said sharply. "What are you doing out here?"

Martinez spat expressively in the dust and made no answer. Desmond wavered for a moment, and then marched determinedly into the watch-house.

After a few moments' hesitation, Greville followed him.

The watch-house was mostly a single large room, centred around a large armchair facing a bank of controls and dials. There was a TV screen mounted above the dials. The walls were crowded with alarms, both bells and signal lights; there was a large-scale map of the Institute grounds, a group of telephones one of which was bright red and marked EMERGENCY ONLY. Beyond the armchair was a tall safe, nearly five feet high, its walls and door of steel. The door stood open at the moment, exposing the complex person-keyed electronic lock. A technician was going over this lock, using the photoflood to light its deep-recessed mechanism.

There were other people in the room; Barriman, Desmond, Kathy Pascoe, and a group of security men including a sergeant with a white, worried face who looked around quickly and optimistically when Greville entered—doubtless hoping that Martinez had decided to return.

Both Barriman and Kathy looked at him with surprise. But neither of them said anything. The sergeant was speaking.

"—only the authorised personnel can open it!" he was saying. "As the chief said, that's him, and Dr. Barriman, and yourself, Dr. Desmond."

"What else was there in the safe?" Desmond snapped.

"The payroll for the security staff, and some items which had been deposited by individuals." The sergeant licked his lips. "But everything else is there okay—that was the first thing I checked."

"And when was this discovered?"

Barriman spoke up. "As Martinez insisted, I kept the dust here and drew daily as much as we required. I miscalculated this morning; I was four grains short. It was about an hour ago that I found out. I wasted some time trying to get hold of Kathy Pascoe in case she had some which she'd taken without advising me—"

"But I hadn't," said Kathy, her face stony.

"All right. Who could have opened the safe?" Desmond rapped.

"Only the three people to whom it was person-keyed," the sergeant insisted. "Kiesler, is that lock in order?"

The technician working on the safe door raised his head. His face was glistening with sweat. "Perfectly," he answered in a tired voice. "You can set this type of lock to respond to up to six different individuals. Right now it's set for only three, and as far as I can tell it hasn't been interfered with since we adjusted it to include Dr. Barriman."

"And that was when the happy dreams package was deposited here—the same day that chimpanzee escaped." The sergeant passed his hand across his face. "Dr. Desmond, that safe can only be opened either by the people it's set to respond to or by cutting into it with a torch, and if you try cutting into it with a torch you set off an alarm right across the room there."

Desmond looked at Barriman; his expression was helpless. Barriman's lips curled. "Then that reduces us to one possibility," he said. "Martinez opened the safe."

There was silence for a moment, except for the sound of the technician turning over parts of the lock machinery.

"Very well," said Desmond at last. "Sergeant, go out and take Martinez under arrest. Lock him in his quarters. And notify New York of what's happened, Barriman."

Afterwards, when things were quieter, Greville went out to near the perimeter of the Institute grounds and sat down on a rock, looking up at the clear dark sky. So far, no one had spared enough time from worrying about the missing package of happy dreams to ask him what he was doing here; they had assumed he was on official business, and would be content to wait to find out what that business was.

He lit a cigarette and stared at its glowing end, like a tiny counterpart of Mars.

Then there were footsteps behind him, and he turned to see someone approaching—a woman.

"Nick?" said Kathy's voice hesitantly. "Is that you?"

"Yes."

She came up and sat beside him on the rock, not saying anything. The sound of her breathing was loud in the silence. Eventually she moved and cleared her throat.

"What are you doing here this time?" she said.

"I came to ask you some questions."

She half-turned her head, tilting it to one side in a puzzled fashion. "Me? What sort of questions?"

"About happy dreams. I was in LA this afternoon, seeing Franz Wald."

A momentary pause even in the sound of her breathing. Her voice was hesitant when she spoke again. "Were you? How is he?"

"Angry and disappointed—the same as Joe Martinez."

"Still?" She sounded sad. "Nick, you don't think Joe took that dust, do you?"

Greville grunted. "How should I know? I hardly know the guy."

"I know him. And I know Franz Wald, too. It's not right, Nick. I—well, I like Mike Barriman, and I respect him too, because he's tremendously able. But God! He's so dogmatic that he won't accept facts when they're stuck under his nose, if they don't agree with what he's previously decided."

There seemed to be an echo of what Wald had said in her words. Greville drew on his cigarette meditatively. "How do you mean?"

"In his book, things happen according to rigid rules. A bunch of experimental animals gets away. So he fires Franz Wald. Tootsie gets away. So he jumps to the conclusion that there's an agent of the happy dreams pedlers on the staff, and gives Joe hell for not catching one. Joe thinks it was Lamancha, at the New York end, who fixed his transfer; personally, I'm pretty certain he wouldn't have done it without a strong push from Mike."

She spread her hands helplessly. "And now—this!"

"You think he's wrong somewhere. Where?"

"If you've been talking to Franz about it, you should know."

Greville hesitated. "That's more or less what he said," he admitted at length. "But somehow I can't make sense of it all. I mean, there are bits of the problem here. They don't fit together."

"Where do you think Tootsie went, and all the rest of them?"

"What do you mean—all the rest of them?"

"The other monkeys, and the first batch of experimental animals—the rats. And the advanced human addicts, for that matter."

"I don't know where they went!" said Greville. "Would I—?"

"I said 'where do you *think* they went'?" Kathy repeated in a firm voice. "Don't try and tell me what Mike Barriman did. I put the facts to him, making him admit them one by one, and drew the obvious conclusion. And he said, 'I don't think any reputable scientist would agree with you.'" She contrived to mimic Barriman's voice when he was on his dignity. "And he said, 'Kathy, I know you're a biologist by training, but you must have heard of the law of conservation of energy!'" She gave a sarcastic little laugh.

"I see what you're getting at," Greville said reluctantly. "But—damnation, it's fantastic!"

"So it's fantastic. So it would be fantastic to see power going into an antenna and not coming out again, if you didn't know about radio waves." She shrugged. "Well, leave it. How about the questions you were going to ask me?"

"I think you've already answered them by implication," Greville told her, and tossed his cigarette into the dark.

"What did you think of Franz?"

"Very bitter."

"Of course."

They sat in silence for a few moments, listening to the distant noises of the Institute. At last Greville shifted his position and said, "But damn it! How could dosing with a drug actually physically cause animals—and worse still, people—to disappear?"

"Franz probably told you that. Didn't he?"

"He gave me a lot of hints and provocative suggestions. He didn't explain anything."

Kathy was shaping a reply when a voice boomed out through the night, startling, as though a giant had thrown his head back and shouted with all his strength.

"Greville! Agent Greville to report at once!"

"How the devil—?" said Greville under his breath, and got to his feet. "I suppose I'd better do as they say."

"I'll come with you."

They picked their way back across the rough ground until they reached smooth roadway. It took them about five minutes to reach the watch-house, where the worried-looking sergeant was waiting on the steps.

"Are you Greville?" he demanded.

"That's right."

"Message for you from New York." The sergeant held out a sheet of paper. "They phoned a few minutes ago. I thought you weren't here yet, so I just wrote it down."

"Thanks." Greville spread out the paper and studied it with a frown. It was from Lamancha, and ran:

"If you refuse to obey Speed's instructions, then you might as well make yourself useful. Immediately on receipt of this message, report to Fieldworker Vassily Marek at Isolation and trace this girl Mandylou Hutchinson who disappeared today."

Greville folded the paper and looked at the sergeant, who said, "You wouldn't have heard yet. It's a girl who was being watched by Marek and Rice. As far as they can establish, she's vanished completely."

"Like that chimpanzee?" said Greville, feeling a chill run down his back.

"Exactly," said the sergeant. "Like that chimpanzee."

### seventeen

"We seem to have fallen down rather badly," said Marek in a stiff voice. He had commandeered the deserted shoe-store which occupied the ground-level section of the building where Lumberger's FAC office was situated; the display windows were boarded up, and not all the dust had been removed from the interior surfaces. Shafts of bright sunlight speared through the places where the boards failed to meet, and danced with dust-specks.

Greville shifted on his uncomfortable chair. "Maybe you should explain in full detail," he said. "As far as I can see, these addicts will disappear when they decide to, and no one can stop them, any more than they managed to stop the chimpanzee that escaped from the sterile lab at the Institute."

Marek's colleague, Peter Rice, gave him a curious look. "What exactly do you mean?" he said, and wiped his plump red face with his handkerchief. It was oven-hot in the old store.

What exactly *did* he mean? Greville wasn't sure any longer. At the moment of uttering the statement, he had felt that he understood it; now, on reflection, he felt that if he tried to explain he would end up by being sceptical himself.

and the hardheaded fieldworkers here with him would be puzzled or dismayed.

He contrived an enigmatic look which made Marek sigh. "Okay, okay. Well, you know how it all started—I mean, of course you do, because it was thanks to your passing through accidentally that we got wind of the incidence of addiction here."

"It wasn't hard to find," said Greville greyly, recalling the scarred thighs of the defiant girl.

"So we found." Marek linked his hands. "But after all, you know, we're not specialist investigators. We're ordinary fieldworkers. We're trained to weigh up environment and find out what social lacks lead to compensation by drug-taking."

"And here," said Rice dryly, "the social lacks come out and jump at you. These kids have nothing. But *nothing*."

Marek glanced at him and then back at Greville. "But that wasn't the point of sending us here. We were instructed to—to hold the fort, if you like. To try and identify all the addicts in town, find out how many of them were advanced ones, and keep track of the various leads until someone with the right kind of training—like yourself—could be assigned to pick them up and follow them."

Rice reached down under what had been a display counter of the store and brought up a long locked box. He opened it, and revealed a thick wad of paper. "We have that to show for it," he said. "Entries on about a hundred and ten addicts. All kids. It makes you nauseous, doesn't it?"

Greville picked up the top sheet off the pile of paper and scanned it cursorily. "Seems fine," he said with a frown. "So where have you fallen down?"

"On this girl Mandylou Hutchinson," said Marek shortly. "It seemed logical to us that the most advanced addict in town was probably the one who introduced the stuff to the local kids."

"Fair enough. And was that this Hutchinson girl?"

"It seemed to be. Peter—the photographs, please?"

Rice nodded and produced another locked box. This one held photographs. Dozens of them. He selected one and passed it to Greville, with a magnifier. It showed a group of four teenage kids sunning themselves on a patch of dry bare ground.

"That's Mandylou Hutchinson," he said, and pointed to the girl on the right of the group, who lay on her back with her legs and arms spread wide to the sun, her eyes closed. Greville recognised her instantly. It was the same girl who had showed off her scars to him the first time he came here.

"The detail is pretty good," said Marek clinically. "We spent our first two days getting those pictures. Fortunately, the kids here spend a lot of time lying around in the sun. When they're not raising hell. We damn' near got pinched as peeping Toms, though."

Greville passed the magnifier over the picture. Under it the little dots on the girl's legs showed clearly. For comparison, he inspected the legs of the others in the picture. It seemed certain that Mandylou was the most advanced of the addicts. There would be something close to a hundred scars on her legs.

He put the picture aside with a frown and tapped the magnifier absently on the back of his hand. "And what's happened to her now?" he demanded.

"Gone," said Marek. "Just plain—disappeared."

"You saw the police wagons as you came into town?" Rice suggested. Greville nodded.

"That's on account of her?"

"That's right. Her father—his name's Quincy Hutchinson—runs the local deep freeze vault. All the local farmers store their surplus with him. Well, he had some trouble with pilferers last winter, apparently, so they got together and paid for the vault to have some alarms fitted. The only way of making sure they covered all the possible entries was to include the living section of the building—he has a four-room dwelling above the vault, you see. He locks up every night, usually when Mandylou gets home. And yesterday she wasn't in her bedroom."

"Was she there the night before?"

Rice gave a humourless grin. "Sure she was. I know. I watched her go to bed."

"Believe me, Greville," said Marek, "since we decided that Mandylou was the most advanced addict in town, we haven't let her move or breathe without us knowing."

"This sounds more and more like that chimpanzee every moment," said Greville harshly. "Escaping from a burglar-proof building, without setting off the alarms . . ."

Cold hands seemed to pass over his nape.

Marek glanced at his watch. "By my figuring, we've got about two hours until they decide to come and get us. It's up to us to move first."

"What do you mean?" Greville demanded.

Marek told off points on his fingers. "One: Mandylou Hutchinson, in her parents' opinion, was a good girl and wouldn't touch dope. Two: in her parents' view, Mandylou must have been kidnapped. Three: we've been hanging around Mandylou—we couldn't hide the fact. Four: UN agents are liked in this town about as much as rattlesnakes." He spread his hands. "I saw the captain in charge of the police who've come down from Great Bend. Saw him last night. His name's Simonson. He doesn't like us any more than the Hutchinsons do, or anyone else in town."

"He's treating it as a kidnapping?"

"I'm pretty sure that if he can, he will, and we'll be arrested on suspicion. Or he may just prefer to let a mob deal with us."

Greville looked from one to the other of them. "You sound as though too much of young Lumberger's company has got you down," he said.

"Lumberger has stood it in this place for going on five months now," said Marek dryly. "He's lasted pretty well, in my view."

Greville glanced at his watch. "Okay, let's go and see the scene of the crime. Will this police captain be there?"

"Simonson? Almost for sure. And by this time he probably expects you. Were you stopped on your way into town?"

"A couple of cops are guarding the road. They checked my ID papers."

Marek nodded. He looked wary. "Anything we should bring?" he asked.

"Yes—as many pictures as you have of Mandylou that show the happy dreams scars."

"As you say," Marek shrugged. "But if you're hoping to get hard facts into Hutchinson's head, you'll die trying."

Rice gave a short, disillusioned laugh and opened the door. There was a sound of running. He cursed under his breath.

"Just in time," he said. "They were going to fire your car, Greville."

"What?" Greville dashed to the door and looked at the car he had been loaned at the Institute to get him out here. Rice was correct; a bundle of oil-soaked straw had been thrust under the nose of the vehicle, and a book of matches lay on the ground a few yards away, where it had been dropped as the owner fled.

"That's the beginning," said Marek heavily. "Maybe when I guessed we had another two hours, I guessed wrong."

It was easy to tell which was the Hutchinsons' home, even without troubling to read the signs outside which said DEEP-FREEZE VAULT—CHEAP RATES—20,000 CU. FT. AVAILABLE FOR HIRE. There were people outside, sun-dried people, who looked the same colour as the dust on the street.

Greville tried not to look at their accusing eyes as he approached, walking between Marek and Rice. There was one thing he noticed about them which puzzled him—there were no kids among them. They were all over thirty, and most of them were middle-aged.

Their stony faces turned to watch the newcomers; grudgingly they stood aside a few inches to let them pass in single file, then closed in again behind them when they had gone into the premises of the Hutchinsons' vault.

The ground level was a reception room, with scales, piles of plastic storage containers, and a flat elevator platform on which goods would be stacked for lowering to the vault in the basement. It was cool inside the double doors, because of the vault underneath.

There was a hard-faced woman in state police uniform sitting in a tilted-back chair beside the elevator platform. She looked up as the UN agents entered and spoke in a cold voice.

"What do you want?"

"To see Simonson. And the Hutchinsons." Marek matched her icy tone automatically. "This here is United Nations Narcotics Agent Greville, from New York headquarters. They have an interest in this case."

"Yeah?" The woman scowled. "All right—come on through. The captain's interviewing one of the girl's boyfriends just now, but I guess you can wait in back."

But she didn't rise to show them the way; just indicated a door at the back of the reception room, with a finger like a dry bone.

Beyond that door there was an office, full of police. They were sitting on anything that came available. Four of them were throwing dice on a table; the other two were just sitting. Again Marek explained their errand. Scowling, one of the officers repeated what the woman outside had said.

"He's seeing to one of Mandylou's boys. You'll have to wait."

That was as far as they got. They stood waiting in the oppressive heat, shifting from foot to foot. Greville was tempted to voice objections, and then remembered the faces of the people standing outside, and decided to keep silence.

In the end, they only had to wait a few minutes. Then a door on the other side of the office flew open, and a boy of about eighteen walked through, his face a mask of boredom. He went straight past the waiting officers and made his way out.

Behind him came a man with captain's rank badges on his sweaty shirt—a gross man, his hair going thin and grey, with narrow eyes and a rash of beard. He leaned in the opening of the door and thrust one hand in his pocket.

"Dumb bastard, that one," he said harshly. "Doesn't know this, doesn't care about that. But he's out of it, anyway. Okay, haul yourselves to your feet—we're going round the town to pick up a few more of them."

"There's some people to see you, cap," one of the waiting men said, not looking up from the dice-game. Simonson turned his narrow eyes on the three UN agents.

"Them? They're not people—they're just bums from the UN," he said, and laughed. It was an ugly sound. Greville felt in the back of his mind for a memory of a voice he hadn't used since he was coach of a sandlot ball-team as a kid.

"Are you Simonson?" he said, straightening up. The voice worked; it somehow suggested broad shoulders and a closed fist. Simonson took his hand from his pocket uncertainly.

"That's my name," he agreed.

"All right. One more crack like that out of you and you go all the way down. I don't mean back to the beat, I mean back to the gutter." Greville took his ID cards from his shirt pocket and fanned them under Simonson's nose. "Narcotics Department headquarters, New York. You're handling this case like a punch-drunk Mexican peon from your showing so far. Now get this. Some of us in the UN agencies got where

we are by doing the *right* thing at the *right* time, and I'm one of them. My business is dope peddlers, and I've met dope peddlers who made people like you look like the pride of the Sunday school. I'm still alive and going up. I intend to stay that way. Clear?"

An incredulous look spread across Simonson's face. It was followed by a wave of redness. "Now look here—!" he began, while the watching policemen turned their gaze away from the dice-game and stared at Greville.

"I'm not proposing to look anywhere," said Greville. "I want to talk to you. Privately. Where you were interviewing that kid, for example. Where is it—upstairs?"

He walked past Simonson and found himself in the hallway at the foot of a flight of stairs. He went up it. Without looking back, he could hear that Simonson, Marek and Rice had followed him.

At the top of the stairs a door stood open—the door of a lounge. Greville went through it and found himself facing a man of forty-odd, wearing business clothes. There was a hatch to a kitchen open in the wall beyond him; through it he could see a woman of about the same age, dressed in black, doing something with a dish on a table.

"Are you Mr. Hutchinson?" Greville snapped. The man stared at him.

"That's right," he said in a dull voice.

"I'm Narcotics Agent Greville," Greville began, and was going to continue when there was a cry from the kitchen and a clatter as the woman there dropped the spoon she held into the dish. She bent down and thrust her head through the open hatch; her eyes were bright and red with crying.

"It isn't true!" she said in a firm voice. "Mandylou is a good girl!"

Greville drew a deep breath and turned to the door as the others followed him in—Simonson sullen and visibly puzzled, Marek and Rice exchanging conspiratorial grins. He said, "The pictures, Marek. We'd better clear this up right now."

While Marek was producing the photographs and the magnifier, Mrs. Hutchinson came through from the kitchen, her mouth set in a determined line. She stopped just inside the door, put her hands on her hips, and looked prepared to deny the truth of two plus two.

"Have you seen these pictures, Simonson?" Greville snapped at the police captain. Simonson shook his head sullenly.

"Marek, did you offer to show them to him?"

"Of course I did. But he wasn't hearing anything other than that it was a straight kidnapping."

"It wasn't," said Mrs. Hutchinson grimly. "My daughter is a good girl."

"All right," said Greville. He picked up one of the photographs and handed it with the magnifier to Simonson. "Take a look at the lines of dots on Mandylou's legs," he directed. "I'm not asking for your opinion on them. I'm telling you that those are happy dreams scars."

"Crap," said Simonson, and threw the picture down on a table beside him. His narrow hard eyes fixed Greville's, and Greville felt the initiative suddenly threaten to slip from his precarious grasp.

"What makes your opinion worth more than mine in my own speciality?" he said icily.

"Those are the scars of a rash," Simonson grunted. "Mrs. Hutchinson told me so. Mandylou had this rash from some vitamin deficiency, probably."

"That's right!" said Mrs. Hutchinson firmly. Simonson took a step forward, coming close to Greville.

"Now you listen to me," he said gratingly. "Maybe in New York and LA and big cities like that you get kids who dope. But around here they're good people. I know—I'm one of 'em. And we get more than enough trouble out of you without your coming here telling lies about our kids. Mandylou was kidnapped, and the way things are shaping right now I'm pretty certain I know who sold her out!"

Greville felt a moment of dislocation from reality, as if the whole world had suddenly lost its element of logic and common sense. The moment passed, and he knew what he must do. He spun on his heel to face his colleagues.

"Which is Mandylou's room?" he snapped.

Marek answered him after a moment's hesitation. "Right opposite here," he said.

"Out of my way," said Greville, and thrust between Marek and Rice.

The room was an ordinary kind of kid's room, with a daybed and half a dozen colour solidos for decoration. He was

in it almost before Mrs. Hutchinson's wail of "Stop him!" died away. A quick glance round made him settle on a bedside locker with drawers in it; he wrenched it open and snatched the first of the drawers out.

And there it was, in plain sight—a small stoppered tube with a little fine brownish dust in it.

He picked it up and spun round to confront Simonson as the policeman entered the room. "See this?" he barked.

"So I see it!" Simonson rapped back. "So by what right—?"

"That's happy dreams in there," said Greville coldly. "I suppose you didn't know what happy dreams looked like, Mrs. Hutchinson—or you'd have thrown this away!"

The woman's face went pale. "It's a lie!" she said, but the determination had faded from her voice, like the colour from her face.

"All right. Then you'll have no objection to being given a small shot of it, I guess. Marek, if the garbage disposer hasn't been cleared since yesterday, you'll probably find the girl's injector in it. Go look, will you? And bring some water and—"

"That's enough!" said Hutchinson suddenly, and his face seemed to crumble like dry earth in a strong wind. "All right, I guess it must be true."

Mrs. Hutchinson buried her face in her hands and started to sob soundlessly.

Greville thrust the small stoppered tube in his pocket and dusted his hands off against each other. "Now we can get started," he said in a satisfied voice. "And unless you and your wife want to be prosecuted for concealing material evidence, Hutchinson, you'd better tell the truth this time. And get this, Simonson!" he added, turning blazing eyes on the police captain. "From here on out, this case gets handled *my* way. In accordance with the facts!"

"I—" Simonson began. Greville cut him short.

"And no more of this crap about 'they're good people round here', either! When it comes to drugs and drug addiction, no one is any better than anyone else, and you'd better write that out good and large and fix it up over your bed so it doesn't slip your memory. Okay, let's get started."

## eighteen

But when he had painstakingly backtracked over the evidence that Simonson had acquired in the past twenty-four hours, his own words rang hollow and ironic in his memory.

"In accordance with the facts!"

Fine. But when the facts aren't in accordance with sense, or logic, or anything . . . ?

As far as the observable facts went, Simonson had done a fair job. It was not in dispute that Mandylou Hutchinson had come home the night of her disappearance—the night before last—had kissed her boy-friend good-night and come in and gone to bed. Hutchinson had connected the alarms, effectively preventing anyone from getting in or out of the building without waking the neighbourhood, because the alarms were operated from his bedroom and sounded both there and on the front wall of the house. At least twenty people were sleeping within easy earshot of the shrill noisy bells.

Essentially, then, the problem was identical with that of the disappearance of Tootsie the chimpanzee. And this time it was all his own.

But so long as there was an alternative to Mandylou having dissolved into the air—so long as there was a conceivable shadow of a chance—he couldn't leave it unexplored.

It had been the boy-friend that Simonson was interrogating when Greville arrived; Greville found out that his name was Hank Darby, and he was the son of the local agricultural machine repair agent. He had premises just outside town, and was doing badly because of shortage of parts.

"Want him brought in again?" Simonson suggested. He wasn't enjoying co-operating with Greville, but he was co-operating after a fashion.

"No," said Greville, and heaved himself to his feet. "I'll go see him myself. Marek—Rice—I want you to go over all your photographs and identify all the addicts in town to the captain and his men. Find out how many of them look as if they've had near the century of shots. And make sure none of them leave town."

Hank Darby was sitting on an abandoned tractor wheel. He was spitting at the edge of his own shadow on the dusty ground, trying to outline his head and shoulders with a succession of damp spots. He was finding it hard work, because

the spittle jumped into a dusty ball on hitting the ground and bounced away from the spot at which he was aiming.

It had taken a bit of dodging to make sure he got here alone, but in the end Greville had managed it. And the dust ensured that he walked silently as he came up to the boy.

"You're Hank Darby?" he said when he stopped walking.

"They tell me so," said the boy, not looking up.

Greville felt in his pocket; he took out the little tube of happy dreams he had found in Mandyloou's locker drawer. He hefted it in his hand and then tossed it accurately into the boy's lap.

Hank stopped in the act of pursing his mouth for another shot at his shadow, and looked down. He didn't move to touch the tube.

"What's that for?" he said, his voice suddenly sharp and suspicious.

"I thought it might be more use to you than it is to Mandyloou now," said Greville in a neutral voice. "It was in her room."

The boy picked up the tube and closed his hand around it. He raised a puzzled, freckled face towards Greville, screwing up his eyes against the sun.

"You're the UN agent Mandyloou showed off her legs to," he said.

"That's right." Greville leaned against the handles of a cultivator that was probably a quarter of a century old, and due for reduction to scrap. There was a lot of scrap in this big yard—more than there was of serviceable machinery.

"All right," said Hank warily. "What do you want?"

"Are you thinking of following Mandyloou?" Greville said.

"Following her?" The boy's tone was convincingly bewildered. "I don't get you."

Greville shrugged. "I'd have said it was pretty clear. Happy dreamers go—if they don't quit. And they don't quit unless they're made to. So presumably you are going to follow her."

"I still don't get you."

"Then I'll spell it out. When they've taken a hundred or so shots, happy dreamers drop out of sight. Vanish. Disappear. Right?"

Hank gave a scornful laugh. "Mister, who do you think I am—a country hick? A hayseed? I don't kid that easy."

"Fact," said Greville. But a tiny frown creased his forehead. He had assumed that Hank would know what had happened to Mandyloou; instead, he seemed to be genuinely sceptical. He tried another line.

"Who started the habit here, Hank? Mandyloou, was it?"

"Why not ask her?" Hank retorted, and gave a sour grin.

"Don't talk nonsense," Greville snapped, a bit more sharply than he had intended. "She's gone, Hank. And I figure you're due to be the next one."

"What do you mean?" Sudden alarm showed in the boy's lean, sun-brown face. His eyes searched Greville's face.

"Just what I say," Greville sighed. "No good trying to deny it, Hank—before I came out to find you, I counted your scars on a photograph of you. Unless you've taken another shot in the past couple of days—and you probably have—I make it one hundred and two shots you've had. You're about due to go where Mandyloou went. Wherever that is."

He stood up and brushed off the line of dust the cultivator had left on the seat of his pants. "Hope you enjoy your trip," he said, and turned to go.

"Hey, wait a second!" said Hank, and got hastily to his feet. "Mister, what's all this about? Where am I supposed to be going?"

As though reluctantly, but feeling a sense of tremendous relief, Greville turned back to face the boy. "That's better," he said with a sigh. "I was wondering how long before you caught on."

"No, but hey! What's happened to Mandyloou, for chrissake?"

"What did you think had happened to her?" countered Greville.

"Well—I dunno! I figured maybe her old man had found her dosing herself, and she'd run off somewhere to stop him beating her. He would, too. Or if he didn't, I bet Mrs. Hutchinson would."

"I see what you mean," said Greville, and managed a wry smile.

"But—well, I wouldn't turn her into the police if she was going to be whopped for dosing herself. But if you say she hasn't just run off—"

"No, Hank. She hasn't just run off. And she hasn't been kidnapped, either. She's just plain disappeared. And it's

beginning to look as though all happy dreamers disappear. All of them."

The implications of his own words—which he even now couldn't bring himself really to believe—made him shiver in spite of the heat of the sun.

Hank shook his head. "Mister, I think you must be crazy."

"So do I," said Greville. "But crazy or not, it's gospel truth."

"How can I know that?"

"Do you listen to the news? Ever see a paper? Then you ought to know that, just for an example, six hundred happy dreamers have disappeared in New York State this month."

"Yeah, but—" Hank's face was twisted with painful disbelief. "I sort of took it for granted that that meant they just left home and weren't heard of again."

"Exactly. The way Mandylou left home. Look, Hank, we're not going to do anything to you, or any of your friends, just because you're happy dreamers. There are millions of happy dreamers, all over the world. We couldn't catch up with all of them."

"But we've got to stop it somehow! We can't have millions of people suddenly vanishing! Can we? In the cities, we can't follow a trail long enough to get back to the source of the dust itself—always we wind up with someone who's disappeared! But here in Isolation, maybe we can. Happy dreaming is fine, it's fun, it's an escape from this dull world of shortages and overcrowding and all that. But somehow, Hank, it must—be—stopped."

He waited to see the effect of his words. A sense of vast relief came over him when he saw the boy nod. His face was suddenly scared.

"Sit down again," said Greville. "I have a few questions I'd like to ask you."

There was a hint of warm wind now; it dried the sweat on his face almost as it formed, and made his skin itch. Greville ignored the irritation.

"First off," he said, "what's it like, Hank? What does it give you?"

Hank shrugged. "Like you say—escape, I guess. You sleep and you get dreams. It gets so you want to sleep more than you can, if you get me. We spend a lot of time just lying in the sun, trying to sleep. Lately, I've been managing

to get the dreams just by thinking hard. Mandyloou could do that too. Say—is that bad?"

Greville felt a shock of horror, thinking of the way Tootsie had sat absolutely immobile in her cage. Her attitude then could well be described as "thinking hard". But he kept his face expressionless.

"It's all bad, Hank. What are the dreams like? What can you see?"

"It's good grass. Rivers. Trees. A lot of big animals, like the ones they say Indians used to hunt. Buffalo, you know? With the big shoulders?"

Greville nodded. "And—?"

"But that's all," said Hank helplessly, and spread his hands. "It doesn't sound like much, I know. It's not so much the things you see. It's—well, it's a feeling that there's a whole lot of good new ground to be gone over. All the time here, something gets in your way. All the folks round here squawk all the time about shortages and lack of this and lack of that—and it's not just hot air. Oh, maybe it doesn't matter that we're short of cokes and candy and we can't have cars the way the old folks say they had cars when they were kids—but it does matter that this wheel here is off a tractor that my old man couldn't get parts for another one, and had to cannibalise. You see what I mean?"

"Sure I see," said Greville gently. "You talk more sense than some people."

Hank shook his head. "Look, mister, we do know—I mean we don't so much like school, but we get to read and write and we know what's going on in the world. I know there are too many people; I know that if we can't get candy here it's because someone somewhere is pretty near starving and needs the sugar worse than we do. They tell us all about that, and it hangs together okay. But—what I'm getting at is that we gang up on you and that gutless guy Lumberger and we call you a UN thief and the rest of it, but it's not *personal*. It's like we were getting mad at the whole damned world, see? And the UN is supposed to be the whole damned world, isn't it?"

"We aren't, of course," said Greville, thinking what a world of understatement the short phrase contained. "All we are is a bunch of guys running around trying to slap patches on the holes that keep breaking out in the levee between us and a real, planet-wide mess."

"Yeah. I guess you don't have time to explain that to other people." Hank's face continued to show vague puzzlement.

Well, so far one thing was settled. That psychologist who had glibly dismissed the content of happy dreams as "ordinary compensation" was talking through the back of his neck. If compensation was what mattered, then logically the visions of Hank Darby, shut off here in his decaying and so aptly named small town, ought to differ from those of John Doe in New York. And if they didn't . . .

A flutter of apprehension stirred his mind. There were frightening conclusions to be drawn from that line of thought, and at the moment he didn't want to face them.

He said, frowning, "Hank, how did the habit get started in Isolation?"

Hank hesitated. "Mister, you did say you weren't going to do anything—?"

Greville broke in. "Hank, happy dreamers fix everything that's coming to them themselves."

"Yeah." The boy's face was troubled. "Yeah, I'm with you there. Okay—then it got started about a year ago. Mandyloou was on a visit with some folks in Frisco. Cousins, I think. And there was one time just after she got back when we were having a kind of private party in the old grain elevator, out of town to the west—maybe you saw it. It's been empty for years, since I don't know when. And she sold some of us a shot. Five bucks. She insisted on five bucks. But later on it was only two."

"Did you always get your supplies off Mandyloou?"

"No—I don't know." Hank's forehead creased with sudden frowning. "Say, you know, that's pretty odd! I never gave it a thought before. I don't know who keeps up the supply—it just always seems like someone's got some."

"Have you ever been the person who just happened to have some?"

"Well—uh—I guess I have. I bought twenty bucks' worth off a guy in Topeka when I was there last fall. And I sold some of it to Jud Crane, and some to Dan Himmelweiss, and—yeah, that's right: some to Mandyloou as well."

"Who was the guy in Topeka you bought it off?"

"Christ, I don't know!"

"Just someone you ran into by accident?"

"Well, not exactly. He was at a party I went to. Thrown by someone I met when he was hitch-hiking through here. But I don't recall the name, and I never saw him again."

Greville sighed. "But surely, the supply must come from somewhere," he said. "It doesn't just grow on trees, does it? Where did your last batch come from?"

"Off Jud Crane."

"Did Jud say where he got it?"

"No."

"Does Jud often have the dust? More often than other people?"

"Not that I can think of." Hank shook his head helplessly. "Look, mister, I can try and find out for you, if you like. I don't think Jud would talk to you like I do, if you asked him direct. But I can probably find out."

"It's not going to be good for you if your friends find out you've been talking with me, is it?" suggested Greville.

Hank's eyes creased a little with dry amusement. "Like I said," he repeated, "all this about UN thieves isn't personal. And anyway, only me, and Jud, and Dan, and Dan's girl Sandy Grogan, are anywhere near the hundred shots you said—"

He broke off. "Mister, I have to believe you! But you know something? I'm scared!"

## n i n e t e e n

"There's a delegation of prominent citizens to see us, Nick," said Marek, coming back from the door, leaving it slightly ajar so that the pattern of shifting light on the figures outside could be seen like an abstract mobile.

"Who is it, and what do they want?" Greville said wearily. He thrust a heap of paper across the dusty top of the display counter which was serving him as a work table. Across the room, the typist who had been sent out from the Institute ignored the interruption and went on trying to get a connection on the emergency phone.

Marek shrugged. "There's Darby, and Crane, and Hutchinson, naturally. And one other I don't recognise."

"Show 'em in," sighed Greville. "Try and find them something to sit down on."

They shuffled in, tense, wary, seeming as dusty as the abandoned contents of the room before the UN agents took it over. They exchanged glances, and then waited while Greville made to speak.

"Good morning," he said at last. The one Marek hadn't recognised was Dan Himmelweiss senior, who kept a failing store. It was he who answered, shifting on his seat.

"Mr. Greville, you have been here a week now," he said.

"Eight days," Hutchinson corrected.

There was a pause. Greville made an inquiring noise.

"It comes down to this," said Hutchinson eventually, and clasped his hands together. "I guess we've been trying to lie to ourselves. I recall you turning out that little tube of—of drugs from my daughter's drawer."

"Is there any way to stop it?" snapped Darby. "That's what we want to know."

And Crane, a red-haired slow-spoken man, finished the request. "Mr. Greville, you've rubbed our noses in the fact that our kids are taking this stuff. Isn't there anything you or we can do to stop them?"

"I tried whopping my boy," Himmelweiss said. "And he just didn't care."

Greville felt sick with helplessness. He looked from one tanned face to another, thinking of what they must be suffering. He said, finding it an effort to shape the words, "I'm sorry. But as far as we can tell, the cure in this case is worse than the disease."

There was no understanding on the men's faces. There was only a dogmatic dullness. "It's up to you," said Himmelweiss after a pause. "If you make us find out that our kids—our own kids—are doing this, then it's up to you to stop them."

Greville slammed down on the counter with both fists, making dust rise cloudily. "Do you want your kid to die insane, Himmelweiss? Because that's what happens to happy dreamers if we take away their supply and put them in a sanatorium. It's plain hard fact! And so far there's nothing we can do about it! We're working on the problem, at the Institute, and right here. But—"

"Where's my daughter?" said Hutchinson stonily. "Where is she?"

"Ask Simonson, not me," said Greville in a weary tone. "He has his men hunting for her all over the state. If she's run out, she could be anywhere."

"But has she run out?" Hutchinson uttered the question with dull resignation, almost taking away its force as a question. "How could she have?"

"That's right," said Darby in a creaking voice, like one of the malfunctioning farm machines he spent his life repairing. "My boy's been acting peculiar lately. Maybe he's mooning over Mandylou, because they were keeping company. But then again, maybe he isn't. Maybe he's waiting to—go."

So they'd arrived at that conclusion for themselves. Greville knew how hard it was to face the impossible facts even in possession of his own superior knowledge. For these men, it must be close to nightmare.

He looked past and between them, at the far wall of the room. "I'm sorry," he said. "We can't do more than our best."

"What *are* you doing?" said Darby.

"That's right," Crane grunted. "Eight days you've been here."

"Look," said Greville, and leaned forward. "Picture me as a doctor. Think of this—this happy dreaming as a disease, a contagious disease which has come to Isolation. What I've got to do is find out who's spreading it. Right? I've found out that your daughter was the first to bring it here, Hutchinson—I'm sorry, but that's the way it worked. What I've got to do now is try and find out who's keeping the supply going. It's no good struggling to cure the known cases so long as the source of infection is still there. Are we to lock up your kids? Are we to treat them like criminals? The hell we are."

"So there's nothing you can do?" said Himmelweiss after a pause.

"I didn't say that. What we can do, we're doing. I can't say more than that."

They shuffled their feet. Greville went on, "What I was going to ask you—you particularly, Mr. Darby—was whether you'd allow us to take your son out to the Institute at Sandy Gulch. Maybe you've heard of Dr. Michael Barriman. He's the chief of research into addiction there, and one of the best men in the world at his job. Hank—like you said—may be getting ready to go. It might be the only hope for him, if he was taken to the Institute."

His companions looked at Darby. After a moment Crane said, "Why his boy? My Jud is pretty near as far gone."

"But not quite," said Greville, in a tone that left no room for more questions.

Darby sighed. "Okay," he said tiredly. "When's he to go?"

"Probably today. We've got Dr. Barriman coming out here this afternoon, to see some of the kids."

"Okay," said Darby again, in a tone of absolute despair.

When they had gone, Greville sat with his head in his hands. He didn't look up when the door opened, thinking that it was probably Marek or Rice who was coming in. Instead, it was Lumberger whose voice broke in on his thoughts.

"I brewed up some coffee, Greville," he said. "Want some?"

Greville raised his head. Lumberger was standing in the doorway with a loaded tray. Steam rose from cups on the tray.

"Yeah—sure, thanks," Greville said. "That's good of you."

Lumberger came forward a little nervously, and put down his tray. He took a chair which one of the visitors had vacated, and offered a cigarette. Greville accepted, and stirred his coffee in silence.

He hadn't seen much of Lumberger since he moved in here, except when he went upstairs to wash up; they were living and eating in this same deserted store where they worked. He had seen him sometimes going out to his experimental sites, or returning.

He said, "You've been keeping yourself to yourself pretty much."

Lumberger forced a laugh; the humour didn't get as far as his young-old eyes. "Habit," he said shortly. "And I didn't want to get in your way. I thought my job was bad enough, but so help me I wouldn't trade with you."

The typist on the other side of the room got her connection at last and spoke in an undertone, barely disturbing the air of the store.

"Is it right that Barriman is coming in this afternoon?" Lumberger pursued.

Greville checked the time. "He should be here in a little while," he said. "They're going to look at some of the kids. Take one of them out to the Institute tonight, where they can keep an eye on him while he gets to the crisis."

"What'll they get out of that?"

"They'll most likely go crazy," said Greville. He sipped his coffee. "I think I will."

"Why?" said Lumberger in a startled tone. "Frustration?"

"Not exactly." Greville found his words coming out almost against his will. "More because it looks as though Hank Darby is due to vanish into thin air."

He gave a harsh laugh, and set down his cup. "I recall you saying just that, when I stopped here to use your phone after I got stranded that time. And I chewed your head off for saying it. Now it looks like you were right and I was wrong."

Lumberger kept a wary eye on Greville's face. He said, "You mean that literally?"

"Maybe."

There was the sound of a turbine outside; Greville half-turned, thinking it might be the car or 'copter bringing Barrimen. But its sound was too throaty; more like a heavy truck. Lumberger heard it too, and drained his cup before getting to his feet.

"That's probably my load coming in," he said. "There's a batch of special soil additives coming in today some time, and they usually send them up on trucks like that. I'll go see."

"Thanks for the coffee," said Greville.

"That's okay."

When Lumberger had gone, he sat staring into nowhere. It was like living a nightmare to be here in Isolation at the moment. The treatment the agents were getting from the citizens suggested that from children to old folk they regarded UN as a vast bogeyman; having failed to scare him away by making faces and calling him names, they were now trying to plead with him to do the impossible.

Abruptly the close air of the room seemed unbearably oppressive. He got restlessly to his feet and went to the door. Outside in the broiling glare Lumberger was talking with two burly truckers, whose articulated yellow vehicle was piled to more than twice man-height with crates, boxes, cartons, packages, stamped FAO WITH CARE or WORLD HEALTH—DRUGS or, like one rack of cases at the back of the load, PURE RESEARCH—EXPERIMENTAL GOODS—DO NOT OPEN TO AIR.

What would be in those cases there? Greville walked idly around the truck, noting that several children—young children,

not the teenagers who had posed this terrifying problem of addiction—were laughing and playing behind it.

But before he could satisfy his curiosity, there was a sound of engines, and he raised his eyes to see a car like the one he had himself from the Institute rolling up the road towards the centre of town. It was a convertible, open to the heat; he recognised Kathy Pascoe at the wheel, with Barriman beside her.

He waited until the car drew up, and greeted them like old friends, almost surprising himself with the warmth of his words. But then, being stuck here in Isolation, one had the feeling that the world was passing by . . .

It wasn't until he had uttered his greeting that he realised neither of the visitors was in a particularly friendly mood. Kathy's pretty face was pouting and irritable, and Barriman's expression and manner were jerkily tense.

He said nothing until he had taken them into the store, given them seats, and found a place to put the documents and equipment they had brought.

There were heavy footfalls, presumably those of the truckers carrying Lumberger's sacks of soil additive up the stairs.

He said tentatively, "Is—uh—something wrong?"

Kathy jerked her head at Barriman. "Just a slight difference of opinion," Barriman said in a resigned voice.

"Difference of opinion *hell!*" said Kathy with sudden fire. "No, for pity's sake, you can't brush it off like that! Nick, what do you make of Mike's behaviour? I say he's acted unforgivably."

"I—don't understand."

"Don't you? Well, you know about Joe Martinez, surely—you were there when the trouble started. He's under arrest. His career is finished. Done for!"

"Who else but him could have taken that dust?" Barriman snapped. "It's impossible for anyone else to have taken it!"

"Then how in hell did Tootsie get out of her cage if she didn't literally disappear? Mike, you can't have one and not the other! You apply your rules when it suits you, and you can't claim to be a scientist and do that. You have to take all the evidence or none of it—"

"Nick," said Barriman in a pointed tone, "is this boy you mentioned here?"

Greville gave a last glance at Kathy's mutinously angry face and turned to him. "Yes, I got his father's approval to take him out to the Institute just a short while ago. If you like, I can send Vassily or Peter out for him—he usually spends the middle of the day dozing around in his father's repair yard, and it's a good chance we'll catch him there."

"No, don't send out for him." Kathy got to her feet. "I want to see him in his natural habitat, so to speak, before we take him down for observation. Mike—you too?"

"I doubt if you'll learn much just by looking at him outdoors," said Barriman. "Besides, I'm half dead with heat. I think I'll stay here."

Greville rose. "Then I'll walk you over, Kathy. He's got pretty friendly with me lately. Maybe he'll open up better in my company."

"Fine."

They walked in silence for a little way, scuffing up dust with their feet. At length Greville said, "What's made you so sore, Kathy? Really, I mean?"

She made a noncommittal gesture. "It's just Mike's dogmatic refusal to face facts."

"Such as?"

"Such as the now undoubted possibility that a living creature, up to and including a man, can melt into thin air."

"I've been thinking about that a lot lately," said Greville after a pause. "You do believe it's true, don't you?"

"How can one believe otherwise? I went and saw Franz the other day, by the way. After you told me you'd seen him, I felt I just had to go and talk with someone who drew the same conclusions I'd drawn—to make me feel I wasn't absolutely alone in the world, and going slowly insane."

Greville glanced at her sidelong. "And did it work?"

"No." Kathy kicked a loose pebble; it scuttered over the ground. "He's sick of the whole business. So am I. I think Mike Barriman is so scared of losing his prestige and being laughed at by his colleagues that he refuses to accept facts."

"Kathy, how—how is it possible? Doesn't it mean throwing away all idea of free will to accept that our idea of reality depends entirely on the chemicals in our brains?"

"Of course not. It reinforces the idea." She raised curious green eyes to his face. "Nick, you've been doing

some heavy thinking, haven't you? I didn't know that was your line."

"It isn't. I'm an investigator. But it's my line—as it is a scientist's—to weigh all the data."

"So you've figured it out right to the bitter end?"

Greville shook his head. "Not quite. I still can't bring myself to swallow the last implications. Look, there's the Darby repair yard. Hank generally goes out and suns himself on the other side of that old cultivator after lunch. Hank!"

There was no reply. They continued to walk forward; passing around the old cultivator with its blunted metal teeth raised in a senile snarl, and Greville's face grew worried.

"Yes, there he is! But why didn't he hear my call? He's been saying that lately he can get the dreams by just thinking hard. Like Tootsie on her last day—remember?"

"Do you mean—" Kathy was beginning, and then put her hand to her mouth suddenly, as though to choke back a scream. Greville could not even move as much as that. He felt struck to stone.

The moment before, Hank Darby had been lying in the sun, his shirt off, his eyes closed, his head pillowed on an old sack. And now there were his jeans disposed as his legs had been; there was the depression in the sack where his head had rested.

And nothing else except the dust.

#### t w e n t y

Kathy stepped forward at last, as though in a dream, and laid her open palms down twelve inches apart—one on the bare ground where the sun had been all day, one on the ground which had been shaded by Hank's body.

"It's—true," she said in a strangled voice. "Feel it! The ground is cooler where he was lying."

Perhaps Kathy was in possession of more facts than he was, Greville reasoned foggily. Perhaps that was why she seemed capable of action, while he was still rooted to the spot. He moistened dry lips with a tongue that proved to be dry also, and spoke in a croaking voice.

"But—Kathy, it's impossible!"

Still kneeling at the side of the spot where Hank had vanished—*into thin air*, Greville kept hearing in his memory, as

though the words had acquired the force of a famous quotation —she retorted with controlled annoyance, “Nick, if we’re not going to accept the evidence of our senses, what are we going to accept?”

There were flaws in that somewhere, Greville felt sure. But at the moment he was too dazed to find them. He said, “I—I guess we’d better tell Barriman.”

“And much good may it do us!” said Kathy sardonically, rising and dusting her hands off against one another. “He’ll say we’re suffering from over-strain and the heat. But you’re probably right. We’ll have to go and tell Barriman.”

They turned together and began to walk away. Somehow, they quickened their pace. By the time they were back on the road they were going at a run, and when they were in earshot of the store where the temporary UN headquarters had been set up, Greville could contain himself no longer. He yelled, “Barriman! Barriman!”

People looked around curiously. Some of them began to follow, at a circumspect distance. The two truckers, who had finished unloading Lumberger’s soil additives, and Lumberger himself, looked around from the entrance of the building where they were sharing a can of beer prior to the truck’s departure.

Breathless, Kathy and Greville halted in front of the store entrance. The door, of course, was locked. Greville fumbled for his key, but before he could get it to the lock, the door was flung open, and Barriman himself emerged, blinking a little against the sunshine.

“Were you shouting for me?” he said.

“He’s just gone!” said Greville stupidly.

Barriman looked from one to the other of them. “What? I thought you went to find this boy. Where is he?”

“I’m telling you! He’s disappeared!”

A peculiar, indecipherable expression passed over Barriman’s face. He said, “Now that’s ridiculous, and you know it. I suppose the next thing will be that you watched him dissolve into thin air!”

Greville drew breath for a vociferous confirmation; he checked himself before he had formed the words. He felt a kind of nightmare frustration, as though he wanted to raise his fist and batter open Barriman’s skull, so that the truth could be implanted in the man’s bare brain.

"What did I tell you?" said Kathy to him, in a voice of incredible weariness. But he scarcely heard her. That sense of frustration had triggered off a feeling in his mind which he had successfully learned to forget, with the aid of the hypnotic formula the psychologist had taught him when he was discharged from hospital in New York.

Varm.

"After all, colour is the most subjective of all our—" He snapped the thread of the words off short, but not before his memory had informed him that he remembered them in Franz Wald's dry, didactic tones.

"How do you know that what you see as red is what I see as red? You don't."

And you don't know that it's what a chimpanzee sees as red, either.

Somewhere at the edge of his consciousness, the auto-hypnotic formula which would release him from this hovered, waiting. He could use it now, if he chose to.

Only he didn't.

The surging, screaming frustration of not being able to make Barriman believe what he knew to be true combined with the heat and dryness of the day, tempting him. Preventing him from turning away the remembered vision of a rich, fresh, lush, new world, full of the promise of riches. Full of hope for a planet over-crowded and over-developed.

Somewhere very close to consciousness, there was a significant fact which he had almost, but not quite, seized hold of.

He came back to reality. Only a second or two could have passed. He had heard Kathy say something else, and now she was defiantly meeting Barriman's disbelieving stare.

Lumberger and the two truckers had walked forward a pace or two, their faces set in masks of amazement. Lumberger said, "But that's impossible!"

"Of course it's impossible!" said Barriman sharply. "You plainly have more sense than these two here. We'd better get them inside out of the sun—they're probably delirious."

"Delirious be damned!" said Greville harshly. "I'm telling you we saw it happen. Go look in Darby's yard, if you like! You'll find the poor bastard's clothes laid out the way they were when he vanished from inside them."

Barriman put on a sympathetic expression and exchanged a glance with Lumberger.

"It's no use, Nick!" Kathy said hopelessly. "He can always make out that we stole the clothes and laid them on the ground. You can't force truth into that man's mind."

Open his head. Force the truth into his brain. And that was it. The clue. From Wald's hypothesis of the non-material creature which would remember light as light, and not as a series of coded nerve-impulses.

He found himself saying, in a grating, ugly voice. "It's not impossible, Barriman. Shall I tell you how it could happen?"

Barriman put on a frightened expression, tempered with bland calm. As though humouring a dangerous lunatic, he said soothingly, "Yes, by all means! Tell us how it could happen!"

Greville drew a deep breath. "Happy dreams—you said it yourself—could only occur in nature as the cell-material of the brain of a highly developed animal. But it's not the same as the compound we have in our own brains. It does the same work, but it's not the same!"

"Our perception of external reality depends on the electro-chemical reactions in our nervous systems. We remember outside events—light, heat, the movement of our bodies—not as themselves, but as coded symbols."

He shot a glance at Kathy. She was nodding vigorously, one white tooth catching her lower lip. When he paused, she said, "For heaven's sake, Nick! Go on! You're doing fine!"

"In this sense, then," said Greville, and found himself calming with the ordering of his chaotic thoughts, "whatever the outside world really is like in its essence, it's plastic to our human perception. Yet so long as it gives us consistent impressions, we can regard it as unchanging reality."

"Yes, yes," said Barriman hastily. "Now suppose you—"

"Shut up!" Greville blazed at him in the voice which had cowed Simonson into co-operation. "Get this! What happens to our perception of external reality if the nature—the actual chemical composition—of our brains is changed? The memory continues, of course—that depends on storage of coded symbols, which can be carried out just as effectively by happy dreams as it can be by the normal noetine. But *we perceive another reality.*"

"And by the same token," said Kathy, her voice mingling excitement with despair, "this reinforces the idea of free will. Because once the changeover is effective, the happy dreamer no longer perceives the reality we perceive. Ceases to affect it. Ceases to *exist*. Proving that it is the conscious component of living beings which is significant."

Barriman threw up his hands. "This is Wald's insane theory turned upside-down and magnified!" he cried. "Kathy, I don't understand you! How can you give vent to such sheer abysmal nonsense? This subjective rubbish? This—" He ran out of words, and began to stutter.

Greville looked about him. While he was talking, Marek and Rice had appeared from wherever they had been. But not only they had appeared. There were others that had come with them. Darby. Crane. Himmelweiss. Hutchinson. Others of the citizens, who were now standing silently in a fringe around the group. Lumberger looked around their set faces; he went pale and stepped back between the two big truckers, as though into shelter.

"What's all this that's going around town?" Marek demanded, seizing the lapse in the conversation. "Someone else disappeared?"

"That's right," said Darby, walking forward. His hard eyes switched from Barriman's face to Greville's to Kathy's and to Greville's again. "Someone been saying my boy disappeared."

Greville passed a dusty hand across his forehead. "I—I'm sorry," he said.

"Then it's true?"

Behind Darby, other men took a half-step forward.

"Yes, it's true," said Greville with an effort. "I saw it happen. So did Dr. Pascoe here."

Kathy nodded, her eyes watchful.

"And you didn't stop him?" Darby's voice was almost a cry.

"It wasn't a matter of stopping him!" Greville found himself shouting, as though in vain self-defence. "It's what happens to all happy dreamers when they reach the end of their time. Kathy, there must have been other cases where people actually saw happy dreamers disappear—surely!"

"There have been cases—of course there have. But people refused to believe it. They said the witnesses were crazy, or drunk, or both."

Bit by bit, Marek and Rice were shuffling around the edge of the group. Now they were lined up: the citizens behind, ten deep as others came to join them, and the word passed between man and man; Barriman, Marek, Rice, Lumberger, with the two truckers on the fringe; and in the centre, Kathy and Greville.

"Go on, mister. Tell us some more." Darby's voice was dangerously quiet.

"Hell—all right! It's not a matter of dying, Darby. It's sort of—going to a different world. It's new and strange, and so far we hardly understand it ourselves."

"Hear the preacher talking!" said a harsh-voiced man at the back of the crowd. Greville glanced automatically in his direction, and saw that for once the crowd was reinforced with young people. He saw Jud Crane with his father; Dan Himmelweiss junior with his; the girl Sandy Grogan with hers.

"I don't want talk of going to another world," said Darby flatly. "I want my boy. Here, in this world, which is good enough for me. Or was, till the UN agencies started mucking it up!"

A howl of agreement and approval chorused upwards. Greville felt Kathy press close against him, and slip her fingers into his. He gave them a reassuring squeeze, and then pulled his hand loose and turned it into a fist. He raised the fist, and walked slowly forward till it was an inch from Darby's nose. The man didn't budge. He barely looked down.

"See this?" said Greville in a choking voice. "That's the wrong way! That's what we've tried to save you and your kids from! We've tried to give them this instead!"

He opened his hand, bent, and snatched a can from the back of the UN truck.

"Mucked this world up? *Who* mucked it up? Us? Yes, of course it was us! What do you think the UN is, anyway—some kind of monster? It's men and women, Darby, like you and me and your wife and kinfolk. We've got too many people in the world right now, so okay, things are short and there's not too much to go around.

"But you know how they'd settle that in the old days? How do you fancy a war, Darby, to kill off a few million people? How do you fancy having that boy of yours sent to rot in a foxhole somewhere he never heard of and doesn't care about? You want that? You're welcome to it!"

He slammed the can back on the side of the truck with violence. It struck the rack of cases marked EXPERIMENTAL GOODS and its side dented in. One of the boards of the case it hit cracked and half of it bent outwards.

"Or would you rather have things the way they are? So your kids don't have cars or cokes to rot their teeth or enough TV programmes to poison their minds. Their legs are straight, Darby—not bent with rickets! Their bellies aren't blown up with pellagra like kids' bellies used to be when things got hard and food was short. There isn't too much of anything in this world right now, except people. But what there is goes around to everyone."

He stepped back, panting. "I'm sorry about your kid, Darby—he was, and is, a good boy. I'm sorry about yours too, Hutchinson. And we're doing our best to stop the rot. But you've got to face it. Two kids have disappeared in this town. In New York State there were six hundred last month, and the number's going up all the time. Where it'll stop, when, we don't know. But we must do our best, damn it! And I'll tell you something." He stopped, looking around the group with his head hunched very slightly forward, as though preparing to spring. "My own wife is going that way. Going the way your kids are going. Do you think I'm lying down on the job when there's a chance to stop her?"

The men exchanged glances. Darby fell back a yard, his face puzzled; Hutchinson raised one arm and put a hand reassuringly on his shoulder.

"Okay," Greville said with a sigh. "I've said my piece. You know it's true. It's up to you to act sensibly."

There was a shifting in the crowd. Some of the men and women on the outside of it slipped away.

*Leda*, thought Greville greyly. But he didn't think of Leda herself. He thought of the Leda he believed he had married. So he had lied, as he saw it in the service of truth. Well, what did it matter?

And then Marek's eyes strayed to the crate from which the board had been cracked away by the violence of Greville's arm when he threw the can back aboard the UN truck. He said nothing, but went up to the truck.

Because he was making a distinctive movement when the scene seemed to be frozen, other eyes followed him. Greville's eyes followed him. He didn't for a moment take in what he

saw. He saw a thin trickle of brown powder pouring like sand in an hourglass from the broken side of the crate.

"What in hell—?" said someone blankly.

Marek put his finger in the stream of dust. He looked at what rested there. He rubbed it, smelt it, moistened his thumb and put a few grains on the moist place.

He turned slowly, dazedly, not understanding, and spoke before he had thought of the consequences.

"It's happy dreams!" he said. "A bulk consignment of happy dreams being shipped aboard a UN truck!"

### twent y - one

"Make for the car," said Kathy suddenly, in a soft voice, and then when Greville still did not move, dragged at his arm with surprising strength. They were away from the group in seconds, barely after the first cry of hatred and execration had been raised; before the crowd had taken its first few steps forward, they were in the car and the turbine was humming.

And they had spun around and were careering down the road before the crowd had started to wreck the truck.

"Kathy!" shouted Greville. "Where the hell are you taking me? What about Barriman? We can't leave the others—that mob will—"

"The hell with Barriman," said Kathy between her teeth. "The hell with the others. I don't care about Mike any more. I'm disgusted by him. I don't care about Franz Wald any more; I thought I did, but he's turned in on himself and gone bitter. I don't care very much about anyone any more, I guess. I think I could probably care about you, if you wanted me to. Because of what you said to Darby. Because you accept the evidence when it's offered to you. But the rest of them can go to hell."

The car was outside the town already, its speedometer indicating eighty-five miles an hour. Like all UN vehicles it was superbly maintained, and except for the rush of wind it hardly seemed to be moving.

"But you can't do that!" shouted Greville. "Kathy, you've got to turn round! We'll help them get away from that mob—if we don't, they'll be lynched."

She turned her head and looked at him, her green eyes like chips of stone. "They'll be all right in the old store—until

they set it afire. We can send someone out to them. I guess Vassily and Peter are all right, and I hope they get away with just bruises. But I hope Mike Barriman has his head beaten in."

The casual vindictiveness in her voice shook Greville. He forced out the single word, "Why?"

"Haven't you figured it yet? That truck was from the Institute, Nick. Carrying happy dreams! You're not going to tell me that Joe Martinez loaded that stuff on, are you? Joe's been fired for stealing happy dreams from the watch-house safe, hasn't he? Only he didn't do it. And Dr. Desmond, damn him, wouldn't know happy dreams from a pile of garbage. Who does that leave, Nick? Haven't you figured it out yet?"

Greville sat back, staring ahead at the unwinding ribbon of the road. "Spell it out," he said.

"All right. It started with Franz Wald and the first batch of animals that disappeared. Franz didn't predict that, exactly, but he drew the same conclusion that you drew about the effect of replacing the cell-material of the brain with happy dreams—a substance that does the same work but differs in its chemical composition. Barriman fired him. I thought—why shouldn't I have thought? Barriman's a reputable man!—I thought he had good grounds for his decision, and after all, it was conceivable in that case that someone had deliberately turned the animals loose.

"But that didn't apply in the case of Tootsie, any more than it applied to the package of happy dreams that disappeared from the watch-house safe at the Institute."

"Who worked out the dose-rates for the experimental animals? You? Or Barriman?"

She glanced at him again before replying; the car swept around a long curving bend, bumping a little because the road-surface was irregular and badly kept. "He did. Nick, I'm being driven to believe that he's sabotaged the series of experiments, piece by piece—by getting rid of Franz when he was close to the right conclusion, by miscalculating the dose to give each of the animals, which would effectively have halted our research if your people in New York hadn't found that new batch of dust which you brought in. Then by taking the dust from the safe and accusing Joe Martinez of it—"

"But hell!" Greville broke in. "What's a load of happy dreams doing on a UN truck in Isolation?"

"Doesn't that fit, too? Hasn't Mike Barriman made it clear over and over again that this stuff could only be produced by someone with access to gigantic productive capacity? All the time, he's been ingeniously disguising facts from us, while drawing our attention to them. He's been keeping up a magnificent front of devotion to research—he fooled me, who was under his feet most of the time, right until the other day. How else could happy dreams be produced in such vast quantities? How else could it be distributed all over the world? How, if not through the channels which are always open because they carry the world's most essential supplies?"

"Through the UN agencies," said Greville slowly

"Of course"

The road ducked into a cutting, and patterns of light and shadow flashed across them. Greville thought back to that first day in Isolation, when Mandylou Hutchinson had boasted to him of her and her friends' addiction. And had said, "The UN doesn't give us this!"

If she had only known . . .

"But how has it remained a secret for so long? Doesn't anyone know about this?" he said desperately.

"Of course people know about it. Of course they do. But who would think to look in a case labelled EXPERIMENTAL GOODS belonging to the Pure Research people? There'd be hell to pay if it turned out that you'd—for instance—contaminated a new strain of hygroscopic bacteria on the way to a soil research site."

"You think it must be the Pure Research people who've been making it and distributing it?"

"It seems most likely." Kathy nodded towards a small town looming up ahead. "I'll pull in here. If there's a phone, we can call the Institute and get someone out to Isolation to quell that mob and rescue the others. I guess we have to. But I don't know how long it will be before Barriman recovers sufficiently to climb back on his dignity and deny that anything has happened."

"It can't be kept hidden much longer," said Greville. "I mean, pretty soon now the number of cases where addicts have actually been seen to vanish will be too large to be ignored."

"It ought to have been too large to ignore a long time ago," said Kathy, and slowed the car to enter the little town. "In my view, Nick, this whole thing has been planned with the skill and brilliance of a conspiracy, and it probably involves the majority of the senior staffs of the UN agencies."

"What? But what could be the purpose of such a conspiracy?"

She stopped the car in front of a drugstore resembling the one back in Isolation. Before getting out, she shrugged.

"Maybe you put your finger on it a few moments ago," she said. "When you told Darby there wasn't too much of anything in the world—except people."

For a moment, Greville's head swam and he saw visions of a network of conspiracy of fantastic complexity, with ramifications covering all the continents of Earth. Then he shook his head determinedly.

"I can't believe it! And yet—well, I can't believe that I actually saw Hank Darby disappear, either."

"You'd better start working to convince yourself," said Kathy grimly. "Because we've got enough to convince an awful lot of people before we're through."

The phone in the drugstore had a poor line; the picture on the screen was blurred and irregular, and faded to blankness before the half-minute period was up and it was due to shift. But he caught a clear enough glimpse of the watch-house at the Institute to know he was properly connected.

He said harshly, "There's been a riot in Isolation. You'd better get someone out there at once to—"

"We know, thanks," said the duty watchman in a savage tone. "They managed to tell us before the mob cut the phone wire. A riot squad went in about five minutes ago."

Greville felt himself go shaky with relief. "Is there any news yet?"

"Not yet. Was that all? We're hellish busy trying to keep track—"

Greville tossed a mental coin. He had been thinking of calling Al Speed in New York, but there was liable to be a long delay even if he used UN crash priority. He said, "Put me on to Dr. Desmond. Now. At once."

Desmond was notoriously a figurehead rather than a true scientist. But despite his public facade, or maybe because of

it, Greville figured he would listen to the story Greville had to tell.

And there was Desmond's voice in the phone, although the screen had not yet picked up his picture. Greville said, "Dr. Desmond! Narcotics Agent Greville here. Dr. Pascoe and I have conclusive evidence that happy dreams is being distributed in UN trucks, disguised as experimental goods."

There was blank silence for a moment. Then, creakingly, "What did you say?"

"It's being smuggled around the country—probably all over the world—through UN channels!" Greville emphasised. "And what's worse, we've got conclusive proof that advanced addicts literally vanish off the face of the earth. We must get this to UN headquarters at once!"

He glanced aside from the phone and saw Kathy standing, her face tense, outside the half-open door of the booth. He gave her a reassuring grin.

"Where are you now?" Desmond demanded.

"In a small town between Isolation and the state line, on the way to the Institute," Greville answered. "We're coming ahead direct to—"

"No, stay where you are," said Desmond sharply. "I'll get someone trustworthy out to pick you up. Have you a car or something that can be spotted from the air?"

"The convertible that Barriman went out to Isolation in. It's parked in the main street outside a drugstore. I think you could spot that from the air—it's UN yellow."

"There'll be a 'copter there in fifteen minutes," said Desmond. "Thanks for calling, Greville. This is terrible news!"

The phone went dead. Greville put down his receiver and stepped out of the booth.

"Do you honestly think—?" Kathy began, and broke off.

"That he can keep his mouth shut? Or that he's not already involved?"

"Both."

"What do you think?"

"Well, he's always seemed to be pretty much of a front for the Institute—I mean, he's just an appointee, not a real research man. They put him in for just that reason, presumably in case a research man was tempted to give his own subject the occasional unwarranted precedence . . ."

"That's how I figured it," said Greville. "And the odds are good that he isn't already involved."

"So what do we do now?"

"Sit down and have a soda, I guess. Wait till the 'copter gets here."

The burring of the 'copter was heard precisely fifteen minutes later, as Desmond had promised. Kathy and Greville exchanged tense glances, and then Greville forced a faint smile.

"Cross your fingers!" he said. "Okay, let's go."

They went out to the car. Overhead, the 'copter was droning low; screwing up their eyes against the sun, they made out that the pilot was waving them to a spot outside town, where there was room for him to put down. Kathy started the car's engine, and they drove rapidly to meet the 'copter.

The pilot was unknown to them, but the one passenger in his craft was the sergeant of security who had been present when Martinez was accused of stealing the happy dreams package from the watch-house safe. He leaned out, holding the door open, nodding to them as they ran up.

"Inside! Quick!" he directed, and they scrambled up. As soon as he heard the door slam, the pilot engaged his rotors and there was the express-elevator sensation of rapid takeoff.

"Where are you taking us?" demanded Greville. "To the Institute?"

The security sergeant shook his head. He was fumbling in his capacious uniform pockets, taking out something in the shape of a gun.

"Nick!" said Kathy in sudden shaking-voiced horror. "Nick, we guessed wrong! We've been trapped!"

"I'm sorry," said the sergeant, with sincere emphasis. "I have my orders." And he fired the little gun, twice.

As the puff of anaesthetic gas spat, stinging, against his face, Greville's last conscious thought was that the whole of mankind must have gone insane.



## twent y - two

How long had he been here? One week? Two? Greville had lost count. All he knew was that he was in the Merciful Angels sanatorium—he recognised the intertwined M-A monogram on the uniform worn by the male nurse who brought him his meals. But the male nurse never said a word, never answered his questions, never did anything except deliver the food and take stock of the situation. The plates were paper, and disposable; the cutlery consisted of disposable plastic forks and spoons.

The days were blending into a grey uniformity.

"If I'm kept here any longer," Greville said sometimes to the featureless walls of the cell, "I shall really be out of my mind. I guess that's why I'm here. I guess that's what they want."

Lately, there had been the gnawing suspicion, born of long hours of solitary contemplation of his memories, that he might in fact already be insane. His visions of an international conspiracy organised through the UN, supplying happy dreams to the world and thus siphoning off addicts into—wherever they went. His recollection of seeing Hank Darby literally, physically vanish. Kathy's accusations against Barriman, as the arch-conspirator. It all whirled in the past like the coloured paper in a kaleidoscope, or like dead leaves under a tree, spinning in the wind.

He had had his third meal today. Through the tiny, high-set window, he could see that the sky was darkening. Aside from that, he had no idea of what was going on in the outside world.

Where was Kathy? In another such cell as this?

And Leda?

The irony of the work he had done, trying to track down the source of happy dreams, trying to cut it off so that there would be a hope of saving the addicts, made him laugh bitterly sometimes. But he tried to stop himself from laughing, for fear that one time the laughter might go on, and on, and on.

What kind of peak would the disappearance rate have reached by now? Thousands per month? Tens of thousands? Was it in fact any more than a trickle, compared with the vast number of new births every day?

He tossed the plate with the remains of his evening meal, and the plastic cutlery, into the sanitary bowl. And there was nothing now except the featureless cell.

But suddenly, as he was composing himself to resist the silence of night, there was a sound at the door, and he tensed. New. Strange. Disturbing. There were never any interruptions of the routine.

The door opened. He caught a glimpse of the male nurse, but instead of coming forward into the cell the man stepped back and someone else moved through the door. With a shock of recognition, Greville saw that it was Al Speed.

He didn't say anything, but remained sitting motionless on the low plain bunk.

The door closed.

For a moment, Al stood uncertainly as though expecting an attack—a barrage of insults, a blow even. When Greville remained silent, he sat down awkwardly on the other end of the bunk, his exaggerated eyes behind his contact lenses round and unhappy.

He said, "Nick, I'm sorry it had to happen like this."

Greville shrugged, and found his voice. It seemed to be rusty with disuse. "I've given up hope," he said, and thought that the words were more melodramatic than necessary.

"I think you can start hoping again," said Al seriously.

"If I haven't completely forgotten how." Greville rose and began to walk restlessly back and forth, four steps each way along the cell. "Al, am I actually out of my mind? If not, what the hell am I doing in the Merciful Angels?"

Al didn't answer directly. He said, "How do you feel?"

"Stamped on by the world," said Greville. "I've been cut off from everything. Locked in. I've been thinking about—well, what does it matter? The colour varm. The disappearance of Hank Darby. Barriman. I'd be a happy dreamer from choice, to get away from this."

"Nick, I'm sorry," said Al, shaking his head. "But—ah, hell, this is an unjust world, and we haven't time to do everything we ought to keep the balance straight."

There was a moment's silence. Greville licked his lips.

"How's Kathy?" he asked. "Is she in here too?"

"Yes. She's okay. I've just seen her."

"And Leda?"

"She—escaped."

"Escaped? Where from?"

"From here. From the Merciful Angels. They've all escaped, Nick. And they'll go on escaping. Here, I want you to take a look at this."

Al reached into his pocket and brought out a folded sheet from a newspaper—the front page. He gave it to Greville, who unfolded it with the intention of looking first for the date. But his eyes didn't get that far. His attention was arrested by the headline blaring across the whole of the page.

### DISAPPEARANCES ESTIMATED AT ONE MILLION!

And underneath, in smaller type above the story, a sub-head:

*Trickle now a torrent.*

His head whirling, Greville read slowly, moving his lips as though forming the words would convince him of their reality. "Authoritative sources stated at UN headquarters in New York that not less than one million 'happy dreamers' have vanished in the course of the last twenty-four hours. Of these, some half-million were in Asia, and almost one quarter in the Americas. A warning was given that the rate may double over the next week—"

Greville folded the paper suddenly, and closed his eyes.

"Al, I'm having hallucinations. I must be."

Al reached out and took the paper. He got to his feet. "No," he said. "It's all true. Come with me—there are some visitors to see you."

Numbly, Greville followed.

They passed along the corridors of the sanatorium from the wing where Greville's cell was located to the centre block. Outside the door of a sitting-room, Al paused, turned the door-handle, and gestured for Greville to enter. Greville obeyed. He was content to let events carry him where they would.

In the room, there were people. His gaze swept over them, and his sense of dream-like unreality redoubled itself. For his eyes informed him that present in the room were Bartimian, Lamancha, Kathy—her face pale, set in an expression that matched the disbelieving look he felt on his own face—and a man whose round, olive-skinned face with its bright black eyes and narrow black moustache was perhaps the best-known face on Earth.

What in hell was *he* doing here—Ismail Zafiq of Afghanistan, Secretary-General of the United Nations?

"Please sit down," said Zafiq, in that resonant baritone with its shading of rich accent which Greville had many times heard broadcast from the rostrum of the General Assembly. "Mr. Speed, are we all assembled?"

"We're just waiting for Dr. Wald," said Al. "He should be here in a moment."

Greville walked across and took the vacant chair next to Kathy. A moment later, the door of the room opened one last time, and Franz Wald came in, expostulating with his companion. The companion was Dr. Desmond of the Institute.

"But you can't do this! This is criminal! This is sheer lunacy! I—"

Wald's aggressive, shrill voice stopped abruptly as he too recognised the Secretary-General. He looked about him uncertainly, and then barked at Greville. "Are you involved in this conspiracy of madmen, too?"

"Please!" Again Zafiq's resonant boom. "It is a conspiracy, but hardly a conspiracy of madmen. Be seated, Dr. Wald, and we will do our best to ensure that our position is made clear. Indisputably, those of you here in this room who have been confined in the sanatorium these past several days have been caused much inconvenience, not to say suffering, but I believe the time has now come to end your suspense and show you that there is—to use the traditional phrase—method in what seems madness."

He glanced at Al Speed, who nodded seriously. "We agreed that we would set an arbitrary limit. We would reveal our purpose on the day when the disappearances topped the million mark. Now, of course, the flow is absolutely unstoppable. We expect that within the next three months not less than one and a half billion of the population of Earth will disappear."

"What?" said Greville faintly. "But there'll be chaos! There'll be rioting! Collective insanity! There'll be—"

"That's all been taken care of," said Zafiq calmly. "We have the most massive propaganda campaign ever conceived now going into effect. We anticipate small-scale rioting in the worst affected areas, but we have complete records of every addict who holds a key post, and there is a deputy ready to take over. The plans exist, and so far they have not failed us

once." He shifted in his chair. "Dr. Barriman, would you please put these people in the picture?"

Greville felt Kathy's hot hand laid on his; he clasped it reassuringly, and Barriman cleared his throat.

"What it amounts to," he said, "is that we are colonising other worlds."

### twent y-th ree

"Happy dreams," Barriman said thoughtfully, "as it's generally called, begins by affecting the higher centres of the brain. It takes some while for the body to get as it were accustomed to accepting this ready-made cell-material and selectively depositing it. But once the process is in operation it progresses swiftly. And the final effect—as you know—is that the subject no longer perceives the world which we accept as the real one, no longer affects it, and to our eyes disappears.

"Picture the Earth, and the entire universe, as a *potential* reality, partly dependent upon consciousness. This is a metaphysical concept, of course, but it seems to be borne out in practice. The chain of evolution which led to man employs one of many possible forms of coding and storage of perceptive impulses. This is what Franz was working towards, of course. I owe you an apology, Franz. But once we had started, we had to see this thing through, make sure no one could divert it.

"What were we to do with this over-crowded Earth of ours? We had started thirty years too late to cope with the explosion of population made possible by the abolition of war and the advances of medical science. Were we to legalise cannibalism, as Secretary-General Zafiq proposed ironically in his last state-of the planet report? Or legalise sterilisation of the unfit? Or allow the world to fall into chaos and famine, to reduce the population?"

"We'd considered all those things," said Zafiq. "Something was inevitable!"

"And then Dr. Barriman proposed this solution," said Al. "I was a pupil of his; I helped to develop the compound, to work out techniques for its manufacture, and then took on the job of keeping it flowing."

"It was, of course, manufactured under the guise of a Pure Research project," Barriman said. "We knew that as a

simple escapist narcotic it would catch on rapidly; we knew that it would be possible through UN channels to ensure that within about two years we had a number of addicts comparable with the number of cigarette smokers in the last century. And when the crisis passes, we can—and will—cure the addicts."

"Those who haven't disappeared," supplemented Al.

"How could the fixed price have been maintained, without UN-sponsored propaganda on the unconscious level?" said Barriman. "It couldn't. Its source couldn't have been kept secret if we hadn't cut off every line of inquiry as soon as we saw it getting dangerous. The affair in Isolation was unfortunate. But we managed to cover up even that. We had to lock you, and one or two other people, away to keep you quiet. But that's finished now. We have three months of danger ahead; when the rush ends, we shall have another chance to set the world straight."

"But—but hell, how do you know you haven't simply killed all these people?" Greville said.

"The world which you perceive when your nervous system is affected by happy dreams is a consistent world. Isn't it? It's a virgin world. A real world, as real as any other. In it, living creatures use a slightly different compound for the storage of their memory-impulses. Identical with happy dreams."

"I think what Greville's getting at is this," said Al. "We know, because we've met each other there. We're not just turning people loose in a strange world, on their own. We've had teams of volunteers in this—other world, if you like—since a year ago, men and women trained to organise, and lead, in the process of taming a strange new Earth. Some advanced addicts have been warned to look out for signs of their work. And those signs have been seen."

"It's working," said Zafiq with satisfaction. "A miracle, and I don't understand it. But it's certainly working well."

"And there's the colour that you call varm," Al said to Greville. "It wasn't news to us, you know. Those case-histories I gave you to read were part of the great official lie. In fact, we know that one of the distinguishing characteristics of life in this other world is that there are *eight* colours in the spectrum, not seven."

"But this is deportation!" said Wald suddenly. Their eyes turned to him. "This is against human rights, to do this without people's knowledge and permission!"

Zafiq's face remained stony-calm. He said, "Dr. Wald, with all respect, you are not aware of the true state of the planet. Few of us are. May I then inform you that if we had not done this, we would have lost about two hundred million people to famine in Asia and Latin America within five years? May I inform you that even if every current project to farm the sea—a special interest of yours, I'm told—and the land goes through without setback, we shall again be in this position in twenty years from now? But at least we shall have twenty more years to plan with."

He shifted in his seat and looked at the wall, unseeing. "But this is not a palliative, an emergency measure, only. It is perhaps a key to what wild-minded speculative thinkers have clothed in the garb of travel to Mars, or to other stars. It seems to me that we have unlocked a door in the human mind, and while at present we are taking this door simply as a means of escape from an intolerable situation, one day it will rather be the door to a new kind of human progress. Eventually, perhaps, we will find artificial methods of directing our perceptions; we shall be able to pass from one mode of perception—one universe, if you like—to another, as easily as we now pass from one continent to another in aircraft."

He looked at Wald steadily for a moment; then at Kathy, and then at Greville. He said, "We are not asking you to judge us. We are the people to whom mankind looked, demanding a solution to an insoluble problem, a solution better than war, or starvation, or selective extermination, or—as I said, and as you have had again quoted to you—cannibalism."

"I think you did right," said Kathy after a pause. Zafiq looked at her, and bowed his head in acknowledgement.

The sensation was very strange. He had learned, of course, the precise mode of operation of the compound that was taking over his brain; he had learned about the initial effects on the temporal lobes and the centres of vision and hearing. He had been told all that before he made up his mind. But when the process was finally established, when the rate of replacement reached the point at which it soared like the line of a graph approaching infinity, it was nonetheless a strange, terrifying, mind-shaking sensation.

And yet there was that promise . . .

Memory, they said, went through the process because the new cell-material performed precisely the same function as the old, and hence personality went through also, and special skills. Most of the dreamers whose dreams had become reality for them had skills; as he had seen during those struggling months after the big vanishing, when the world had lost so many people that its vast organisations threatened to totter and break down, it wasn't the inadequate and lazy who were attracted by the visions happy dreams afforded—rather, it was the frustrated person whose initiative was baulked at every turn by shortages, over-crowding, lack of facilities.

Well, they'd got through the crucial period somehow. A small war in Africa, stamped out within a week of breaking out; religious hysteria in India, somehow controlled and canalised before it interfered with any vital programme; chaos in the highly developed areas of Europe and America, handled by brilliant improvisation on the part of the UN agencies and brought back bit by bit to normal working; and in China and the rest of Asia, mainly fatalistic resignation.

So the gamble had come off.

How about his own gamble?

Where, after all, was he going? The question had no real meaning. This other world was in the mind—perhaps it was a minute fraction of a second, a time-quantum, distant, in the past, the future, or to one side of the normal human world. It made no difference, after all. He wasn't, himself, physically *going* anywhere.

Sooner or later the philosophers would find an acceptable way of defining this event. Until then, people would have to accept it, as they had accepted other inexplicables in the past. And somehow, they had kept going. They had always managed to keep going.

When it finally happened, it was as easy as waking up. It was a kind of waking up. Only it was an awakening in a world where there were eight colours in the spectrum, and there was a certain difference in the feel of the air, and there was a difference in a few small sounds. The song of a bird was the first he recognised.

He rose to his feet, wondering. It was cool, but not cold; he was naked, of course, because only he himself—what he perceived as himself—had changed. He looked about him. There were trees. There was grass. He was standing on

level ground, but a short distance away there was a rise in the plain, and he could hear water and fancied he could make out human voices mingling with it.

He walked in the direction of the sound of water.

When he topped the rise, he found he was looking down on a town. There were cabins of wooden planks. There was a watermill turning in the river. There were sounds of hammering, on wood and on metal. He could not see anyone, but he heard voices now, calling quite loudly and distinctly to each other. He went down into the little town. There must be hundreds of people living here, he thought.

He paused at the door of the first small house. There was smoke rising from its chimney.

And then the second miracle happened. He had barely decided to knock on the door and ask what he must do, when the door was flung open and he heard his own name cried out.

"Nick! Nick! You're here!"

And Kathy was standing in the door, half-laughing, half-crying. She wore a plain straight dress woven of some sun-bleached natural thread; her feet were thrust into sandals of plaited reeds.

For a moment she went on trying to form words. Then she gave it up, jumped from the step of the wooden porch, and flung her arms round his neck.

"Nick, this is the most wonderful world!" she said. "All the things they've done already! All the things there are to do!"

Greville looked down at her, smiling, and saw that the bright eyes she raised to him—were warm.

"A new world," he said. "A different world. I'm looking forward to it."

She spun round, caught his hand, and tugged him towards the door. "Come and see what I've been doing! I've been making clothes, weaving and sewing; I've been testing plants and helping to discover natural drugs; I've been—oh, you'll have to find out for yourself what we've been doing."

The newcomer in the new world, Greville followed her.

*John Brunner*



The meagre output of hardcover science fiction so far this year has been highlighted by the familiar yellow-jackets of Victor Gollancz. Following the successful *Dragon in the Sea*, *Wolfbane*, and the recent *New Maps of Hell* (all thanks to Kingsley Amis for name-weighting the gospel spreading) the treatment is now being given to Arthur C. Clarke, deservedly and long overdue for one of Britain's top s-f authors. His first book under the new imprint is a representative collection of 24 short stories, **The Other Side of the Sky**, (Gollancz, 15/-) admirably displaying the many-faceted talent of Mr. Clarke, ranging from the more-than-adequate fictionalisation of ingenious astronautic ideas (on which he speaks with authority) to the almost poetical and dreamlike quality of his more imaginative flights of fancy. One might scoff at the opening remark in his bibliographical note, if it were by a lesser author, but fondly remembering Arthur's early "Ego" nickname, one forgives and wholeheartedly agrees. An essential for the permanent bookshelf.

The rumours of yet more s-f to come from Gollancz were well-founded, and I have received an important announcement from them concerning the consolidation of their future programme under the generic heading "Gollancz Science Fiction Choice," anticipating at least one s-f title per month, complete with dated jacket band. The August choice will be Hal Clement's *Needle* and September's a new anthology edited by Kingsley Amis and Robert Conquest which I know to be excellent. Following in order will be Frederik Pohl's *Drunkard's Walk* (from *Galaxy*) and Damon Knight's collection *Far Out*. This venture merits success despite a certain opinion prevalent to the contrary of labelling science fiction specifically, and so perhaps narrowing appeal to the informed and unprejudiced minority rather than letting escape into the general novel field hoping to snare the newcomers, many with sad previous experience of "science fiction" and who, frankly are needed in their tens of thousands.

Leslie Flood

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